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## A Third Person.

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"INTERFERENCE," "A FAMILY LIKENESS," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XXIX.

#### FIRST ON THE LIST.

ROGER HOPE had quitted No. 15 on a bitter winter's night, and he now returned to it, on a blazing August afternoon, but, save for the difference in seasons, it was absolutely unchanged. There was the hat brush in its little nook in the hall, and Annie's green linnet chirruping on the first landing. In the drawing-room, he found his aunt sitting beside the open window, and William the Conqueror lolling on the sill—instead of both being in front of the fire as formerly. The chairs, with their fat silk cushions, the palms, Indian curiosities, and big photograph screens, were all apparently just as he had left them. He could not have explained the fact, or offered any sane reason, but he had quite a sentimental affection for his aunt's pretty drawing-room. Mrs. Baggot sprang up to meet him with the agility of sixteen, and, throwing her arms round his neck, said :

"Last time, I kissed you for your mother, Roger—like the old song. Now I kiss you for yourself. How are you, my dear boy?"

"Oh, nearly all right ; but they thought I had better get off before the rains, on account of this fever I've had hanging about me. The regiment comes home this trooping season, you know."

"I am glad to hear it. I cannot compliment you on your looks. Roger, you are a perfect wreck."

"Well, I can compliment you, Aunt Polly. You are looking not one hour older, or a day over forty."

"You are a humbug. I am getting as wrinkled as a piece of wash-leather. But come along and sit down here. I suppose you have heard our grand piece of news?"

"Yes; about Clara and the general."

"They say one wedding makes another, and I'm really very uneasy about Annie and Mr. Friar. You remember him—the emaciated-looking curate? But if Annie leaves me, I shall have to get married myself," and she laughed. "When did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday, and I thought I'd just run down and see how you were all getting on. You know, to a man home from India, a four hours' journey is no more than crossing a road."

"My dear boy, pray make no apologies. When you were home before, you came to see me last of all, and now I am first on the list; I am only too glad to think you like us. By the way, who told you about Clara?"

"Miss Yaldwin. I travelled part of the way with her."

"Oh, that was quite a pleasant little coincidence. She is still Miss Yaldwin, you see. Are you not glad of that?"

"I don't know, Aunt Polly. Why should I be glad?"

"You used to like her so much—she is quite one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen."

"Yes, but—

'If she be not fair for me,  
What care I how fair she be?'

"Oh, is that it?" surveying him critically; "but why should she not be fair for you?"

"I don't know."

"Roger! Upon my word—you and your 'don't know!' I could shake you. Have you ever asked her?"

"Yes—I wrote," he admitted gloomily.

"And what was your answer?"

"None—neither 'yes' nor 'no.'"

"And you were afraid to take silence for consent, eh? It's my opinion she never got it," she added cheerfully.

"That may be—I sent it in an unusual fashion."

"Why in the world did you not speak to her? I always think it so cowardly to write. A girl prefers being asked—please to remember that in future."

"That's all very fine, Aunt Polly ; but when I was here last, I never had a chance of speaking to her."

The old lady pondered for a moment, smiled slightly, and then said :

"Well, I will guarantee you plenty of opportunities *now*. Try again, Roger ; you will find that it will all come right. Dear me, if it comes off, how pleased I shall be, and so will Annie. As for Clara, she will be your grandmother-in-law. Oh dear, dear me ! " bursting with peals of laughter, and throwing herself back in her chair, "that will be too, too funny. Clara is lurching out to-day," she gasped, when she had recovered ; "she is busy about her *trousseau*."

"I suppose you will be forced to part with him," pointing to where William lay outstretched and asleep ; "but, at any rate, you will have the satisfaction of knowing, that he is only next door, and that you can still supply him with canaries."

"Oh, you don't know, of course, that the general is going to sell the lease of No. 13 and take a house in town ; Clara thinks Morpingham too dull, and the society much too ancient and decrepit."

"Does she, indeed ? Well, Annie," to his cousin, "here I am again, you see," as Miss Baggot entered.

He kissed her this time, for he liked old Annie, as he called her, and Annie's sallow face became of a sort of deep fawn.

Lunch was now announced, and as they sat at the round table, Mrs. Baggot, who was brimming over with good spirits, exclaimed :

"Well, I declare ; this *is* nice ; just the three of us here, and quite like old times."

It seemed to Roger that his aunt and Annie were enacting the part of mice, in the absence of the cat, and that the approaching departure of Clara would not be harrowing to their feelings. Annie, who always showed her good-will by pressing dainties on her friends, and who was secretly concerned to see her cousin so much altered, vainly plied him with all the good things of the season.

Conversation, after drifting out to India and then round Morpingham, settled down comfortably next door, and the general, his money, his stamps, his good qualities, his fine settlements, were discussed.

"Rose is quite an heiress now," remarked Annie. "She has all her grandmother's money."

"And in consequence has received several offers of marriage," supplemented Mrs. Baggot. "It is a very pleasant thing for a girl to have money of her own—it gives her plenty of choice—I had money myself, you know."

"But I am sure my uncle never gave it a thought. If a man cares for a girl, he does not think of her money."

"Pray, how do you know, Master Roger? All the same, it is very nice of you to pay a compliment to your old auntie, and I must honestly admit that Henry was quite indifferent to my *dot*. What are you going to do this afternoon? Shall we take a drive? I never ride now."

"I have promised to go in next door about four o'clock," he answered a little shyly, "to look at the great stamp."

"What a wonderful attraction these stamps have!" said Mrs. Baggot, casting up her hands. "I am glad that you are of an *adhesive* nature, Roger. I shall get you to take in a note for me—I want the general and Rose to come to dinner."

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### A STRAY NOTE.

AT four o'clock to the second, Captain Hope presented himself at No. 13; was admitted, and actually welcomed by Leach. This was a change, but there were other changes here; he scarcely recognized the house, especially the drawing-room: gone were the iron-grey curtains, the files of stiff chairs, the cribbage board, the old lady with her ear-trumpet, and the minar (he was in disgrace and banishment in the kitchen, as his remarks were far too personal for Clara's delicate sensibilities; he was a coarse, uncourteous bird; she often wished that William the Conqueror would eat him). There were pretty chairs and sofas, a piano turned out backwards and fashionably draped; there were palms, flowers and, oh, suggestive item, two little fat green love-birds in a cage! Evidently the general was determined to have a modern home for a modern wife. The door opened and he came into the room, followed by Rose in a cool white dress. After vigorously discussing the weather, the condition of the army, and the volunteer review, the general said:

"Well, come along now and I'll show you *the stamp*. I won't detain you long, but will send you back to Rose for a cup of tea. I've some business letters to write for the next post, and I have to take Clara out when the great heat of the day is over; my time is not my own now, you see," he added jocosely.

Thus talking as he preceded him, he conducted Roger into the well-known study; it was but little changed, save that it was pervaded by large-sized, flattering, photographs of Clara. There was one on his writing table, three on the chimney-piece, two on the wall. The great treasure was deliberately produced and flaunted before Roger's eyes, but he gave it a very indifferent, not to say cursory inspection; he did not seem to care, when his host repeated in a husky confidential whisper:

"And I got it for nothing—for nothing, sir."

"Look here," said Roger, controlling an insane impulse to throw it into the fire; "may I ask you something?"

"Of course. You are not going to ask me, if I am sure it's not a reprint? I can swear that it's genuine," banging the table with his fist.

"Reprint be —!" He swallowed down a bad word as he said, "I want to ask if Miss Yaldwin is engaged to be married."

"Bless my soul, sir! not to my knowledge."

"Then if it is a clear course, may I try my luck?"

"You may, with all my heart; yes, that you may. There is no one I'd like so well. I've always fancied you, and I'm sure Clara will be delighted." (Poor innocent old man.) "You know Rose has my wife's fortune—five hundred a year—and I'll settle something handsome on her—her father's share—and, look here, Hope," with a sudden, wild burst of generosity, "I'll leave you my stamps; you'll value them. Of course Clara has a taste that way, and a fair amateur collection, but women have not the same sound feeling on these matters as men—but that is strictly between you and me."

"My dear general, this is very good of you," said Roger, rising to his feet, "but it is rather premature. It is by no means certain that Miss Yaldwin will have me."

"Then, my good fellow, just go and ask her at once; there is no time like the present—short and sharp has always been my maxim." (Mrs. Skyler would scarcely agree with this.) "I'll be like what's his name, and hold the bridge; you shall have five

minutes without interruption ; you can easily say all you have to say in five minutes. I wish you luck." And he pushed him into the hall.

Rose was arranging some flowers as he entered. She looked up and smiled, and said :

"I am afraid you are a humbug ! You cannot have made a very exhaustive examination of the stamps."

"No—ah—the fact is, I scarcely looked at them. I wanted to see you, Miss Yaldwin, and to ask you, if you got the note which I put in at the top of the bouquet ?"

"Note," she repeated, colouring ; "no, there was no note."

"You know," he pursued doggedly, "when I came back from the ball I had still your bouquet. I was desperate at not seeing you, and I wanted to send you a line. My time was to be reckoned by minutes, so I dashed into my aunt's boudoir, and scribbled off a note. I felt that I *could* not go, without some sort of an answer from you. I stuck this note on the top of the flowers, where you could not fail to *see* it, and Annie promised me that she would give you the bouquet with her own hands."

"The bouquet was brought by a servant, for Annie was ill—there was no note," and, blushing a guilty smile, she added, "You know my love for keeping pressed flowers ; I—I have the bouquet still."

"You have !" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes ; I kept it in water and cut the stalks, and it lasted for days, and when it was quite dead I rolled it up in silver paper and put it away. You see," she pleaded apologetically, "it was my very first bouquet ; I have not looked at it for ages."

"Would you mind looking at it now, or am I giving you a lot of trouble ?"

Rose left the room at once. Her heart was beating fast—no, it was not from running up-stairs. What did he mean about a note, and an answer, and being quite desperate ? She pulled out a drawer and got the bouquet—*the* bouquet, indeed—unfastened the paper that inclosed its dry remains, and spread it out before her. The once lovely white nosegay was now a mere wisp of withered leaves and twigs. She untied the string, cut the wire, and it fell to pieces ; and, behold, there in the middle lay a crumpled letter—a note written on Mrs. Baggot's crested paper

much discoloured, but legible. Rose trembled as she read it. It said :

" DEAR ROSE,

" You have broken your promise and I am just starting. Why did you not come to the ball? I am desperately disappointed. I wanted to ask you a question, and to take away my answer from your lips. I must scrawl the question here, whilst the cab waits. You know that I love you, Rose; will you be my wife when I return to England—please God, in a year's time, or less? Send me a line—yes, or no. Something has come between us of late; I never can see or speak to you, try as I will. The 'Euphrates' sails to-morrow afternoon. I can get your answer before we start: one word, which will make me happy or miserable.

" Yours always,

" R. HOPE."

It was evidently written in hot haste, but Rose managed to master every word. She read it twice, and then, by a sudden impulse of self-vindication, she put it back to its place among the stalks, rolled it up in them, and carried the bouquet down to its donor.

She advanced into the drawing-room, looking rather white, and laid her treasure on the top of the cottage piano, and saying as she did so, with a sort of catch in her breath :

" It was there—I have found it," and she held up the note. " Some one must have pushed it down; it was twisted in among the stalks, as you can see."

" And you have read it?"

" Yes, I have," and she blushed prodigiously.

" And after waiting for eighteen months, may I hope for an answer now?"

Rose looked down, but made no reply.

He came a step nearer.

" Do you think you could accept me as companion, instead of the pleasant elderly lady?"

A brief flicker of a smile was evidently considered a satisfactory reply. The general's five minutes had been lengthened into fifteen.

Rose stood turning over the remains of the dead bouquet with mechanical fingers, listening to the eager words of her companion.

"There is nothing to prevent our being married at once," he was saying. "This is August, and September is a splendid month abroad."

"You are going a great deal too fast—we must consider grandpapa's plans."

"Well, I won't ask you to take part in a double wedding."

"No," she interrupted with a smile. "That would be too ridiculous, and we can afford to wait."

"It seems to me, that I have waited a good while already," he protested.

"But, surely that was not my fault."

The lady whose fault it had been, was now actually in the hall, having an animated altercation with her *fiancé*, for the general had opened the door in person, and said most mysteriously :

"Come into my study, Clara—you must not go into the drawing-room just now."

"Nonsense, dearest. What *do* you mean? Is the chimney on fire?"

"I mean," he whispered, "that Hope has just asked my permission, to speak to Rose."

Before he could add another word, the handle was briskly whisked round, and the door of the drawing-room flung wide open.

Yes, sure enough. There were Rose and Roger standing beside the piano (which occupied a conspicuous place), and on the top of it was spread out, what looked like a bundle of withered twigs and stalks. In a second, the astute lady had divined the bouquet—and her equally astute cousin had divined her guilt. He saw it in her heightened colour, and her stealthy glance. Yes, she was the culprit. She had watched Roger insert the note, and when he had rushed upstairs to change, she had got a long knitting needle out of Annie's basket, and poked the *billet doux* entirely out of sight, knowing well that Rose Yaldwin would be the last girl to search for one.

So, she was too late! She saw it in Rose's blushes, and in their happy faces. There was nothing now for her to do but accept the inevitable with what grace she could muster; but she had great command over herself, and was always equal to any emergency.

"Ah! I see how it is. You sly people," graciously extending both hands to Roger, and turning to kiss Rose. "I am so charmed. Now we shall be doubly connected. It seems, my dear, that after all"—and as she smiled into the girl's face, her squint was positively startling—"you had never given up—Hope?"

"It is fortunate for me, that she had not," replied Roger. "She will never be without it as long as she lives," for, placing her hand in the general's, he said, "she has promised to be Mrs. Hope."

The general beamed on the young couple; kissed Rose warmly; wrung Roger's fingers, and with a promise to dine next door, he hurried back to his letters, leaving the betrothed pair alone with Mrs. Skyler—their evil genius.

Roger now remembered, with unpleasant distinctness, that he had left the note and bouquet in Clara's neighbourhood the night of the ball, and felt a firm conviction that he owed all his love troubles to the fascinating woman before him, who, with her hands locked in an engaging attitude, was gazing at him meditatively, with her head on one side.

"Dear me," she cried, "how interesting! Roger, you are hope. Rose, it seems, has been the embodiment of faith. And I —"

"And you," he interposed, his mind sore with an exasperating sense of injury, "would scarcely present yourself as charity. That would never do. I have not had a chance, as yet, of congratulating you. Allow me to do so now. We shall be, as you mentioned, doubly connected, and I cannot tell you how I am looking forward to the time, when you, dear Clara, will be not only my cousin—but my grandmamma!"

\* \* \* \*

Mrs. Baggot's little dinner was a brilliant success. It is not often that a party of six includes two engaged couples. The younger pair had the heartfelt sympathies of Mrs. Baggot and Annie. Annie looked upon them as her special *protégés*, and her mother was enchanted; seldom had her spirits been so high, or her eyes so bright, her pleasantries so many. She kissed Rose repeatedly; she took off her best emerald ring and slipped it on her middle finger, saying :

"At any rate, there is your first wedding present, my love." She made Roger carve, and actually placed herself between him and Rose, saying, "I hope you will never have a worse person than me to come between you," and altogether behaved like a fussy old lunatic, in the opinion of her eldest daughter.

Clara was splendidly dressed—over-dressed. The body of her black gown was blazing with diamond stars, swallows, lizards and frogs. A costly bouquet lay beside her. She talked of her future French maid and her new landau. Her laugh was loud and constant, and she was effusively affectionate to her "dear general," as she called him ; but there was a hard, set look about her face, that afforded a strong contrast, to the radiant expression of the younger *fiancée*, who had as yet neither flowers, or diamonds —nor even an engagement ring.

After dinner there ensued the inevitable game of whist. Clara made a bold attempt to thrust Rose into her place, as partner to the general, and thus to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Roger ; but she was foiled in her manœuvre, and, to her great disgust, the newly-betrothed pair were allowed to withdraw into a corner, to whisper together over a book of photographs. Many a time Clara's malignant eye, wandered from her cards in their direction, and her mistakes in consequence, were particularly flagrant. Clara hated whist, and dreaded these games with her future lord and master. A whist table was the one impregnable position where she had not the smallest control over him or his temper. He scolded her openly, and glared, and thumped on the table, and called out in a stentorian voice :

"God bless my soul, woman ! Are you an idiot ? That was a thirteenth card !"

And all this before Roger. It was really too mortifying.

Meanwhile, Rose was inquiring in a low voice :

"How could you say it, Roger ?"

"Say what ?" he whispered in reply.

"About Clara being your grandmother. Did you not see how dreadfully angry she looked ? She will never forgive you."

"I don't care. I was dreadfully angry with her. And as to forgiveness, she is in my debt, and I am not sure, that I shall ever grant her a pardon."

"Why, what has she done ?"

"I cannot tell you just now, but I will tell you something else instead. Your grandfather has offered us the minar."

"Oh, has he?"

"And I have accepted him, subject to your approval. We can keep him in the hall to receive visitors."

"I shall be delighted to have him. He never calls me horrible names, as he does Clara—I am always his good girl, and his own Rose."

"Indeed. And pray, who has taught him to be so affectionate?"

"Grandpapa," she answered with a laugh. "Times are changed, you see."

"I see. But your grandfather and the bird will have to make up their minds to another change. They must forego their claims in deference to mine, for now you are *my* Rose—notwithstanding delays, obstructions, lost letters," and to himself he added, with a glance at the whist table, "in spite of my clever cousin Clara."

THE END.

## Mummied Animals.

NOT only did the ancient Egyptians embalm the bodies of the human dead, they performed a like operation upon the remains of the sacred animals, though in general less expense and trouble were taken over them, animals being chiefly prepared by soaking in natron.

The list of sacred animals is a long one, though the very ones that were most highly esteemed in some places were most abhorred in others.

The list includes dogs, cats, monkeys, lions, wolves, jackals, foxes, hyænas, bears, ichneumon, shrew-mice, bulls, deer, goats, sheep, hippopotami, vultures, eagles, falcons, hawks, owls, ibis, geese, swallows, crocodiles, toads, lizards, serpents, fish of various kinds, rats, mice, beetles, and even insects and flies. As a rule, with the large animals, the head only was mummied, the body being represented by pieces of wood. The birds are squeezed together and lose their shape, except the ibis, which, according to Belzoni, is formed like a fowl ready to be cooked. The ibis and the hawk appear to have had the most care bestowed upon them, for resin and asphalt are frequently found within their envelopes. Birds in general having been wrapped in their bandages, were then placed in an earthen urn and deposited in the tomb.

No mummies of animals are to be met with in the tombs of the higher class persons; most of them had their own proper sepulchres consecrated and appropriated to their species only, but they were occasionally found mixed.

The catacomb of birds is distinct from the catacomb of human mummies. One bird only is inclosed in each earthen pot, and an infinite number of pots were found in good order, whole and sealed; the hot nature of the materials with which they had been embalmed had, however, dried up the greater number to powder. Upon the possession of Egypt by the French, upwards of five hundred mummies of the ibis alone were discovered in the catacomb of birds. Certain animals were maintained at the public expense in sacred parks, and persons were appointed to nourish them with the greatest care. Bread, milk, honey, meat,

birds, fish, &c., were all supplied according to the nature of the animals ; no expense was spared ; the keepers bore upon their persons the resemblance of the species to which their care was devoted, and people paid marks of respect to them as they passed along. The greatest sorrow was manifested at the death of any of them ; they were embalmed and interred with great pomp and splendour.

So great was the veneration in which these animals were held, that though when a famine afflicted Egypt the people were driven to eat human flesh, yet the sacred beasts, birds, reptiles or fishes were always respected ; they would rather eat their own species than lay sacrilegious hands upon what might be gods in disguise.

Animals of the lowest character, even noxious insects, were fostered in their temples, nourished by their priests, embalmed after death, entombed with pomp, and received all kinds of honours.

Those who either by accident or design occasioned the death of any of these animals paid the forfeit of their lives as the penalty of the offence. Diodorus Siculus says, " He who has voluntarily killed a consecrated animal is punished with death ; but if any one has even involuntarily killed a cat or an ibis it is impossible for him to escape capital punishment ; the mob drags him to it, treating him with every cruelty and sometimes without waiting for judgment to be passed."

If a cat died, the owner of the house shaved off his eyebrows, but if a dog died, he shaved his whole head, which would appear to denote that dogs were held in greater veneration than cats. In either case the greatest grief was shown, the people beating themselves on the breast and uttering doleful cries ; the animal was then delivered to the embalmer to be prepared and deposited in the proper tomb.

The cat was principally worshipped at Bubastis. Most of the cats that died in Egypt were embalmed and buried there. In the desert valley near to Beni-Hassan is a small temple excavated in a rock, and dedicated to the goddess Bubastis, surrounded by different tombs for sacred cats, some cut in the rock. Before the temple, under the sand, there was found a large mound of mummies of cats folded in mats, and mixed with those of dogs ; and further on in the desert plain were two large collections of mummies of cats in packets, and covered with ten feet of sand. One tomb was filled with cats carefully folded in red

and white linen, the heads covered by masks representing the cat, and made of the same linen.

There have been more mummies of the ibis found in Egypt than of any other bird or animal, but very few in a perfect state. At Memphis there are thousands of them in pots of common stone or blue ware, or of hard polished stone of a lengthened conical figure ; even the eggs of the ibis have been found preserved.

Hardly ever have mummied animals been discovered in the human tombs, and never by any chance were amulets put with animals.

Crocodiles were embalmed and deposited in catacombs purposely excavated for them. The small ones were bandaged entire, but when they attained any size only the head was embalmed, the remainder of the animal being represented by stalks of palm trees, bandages, &c. In the caves of Maabdeh, however, entire mummied crocodiles of the largest size have been found perfectly preserved.

Generally, five or six serpents were inclosed in one envelope ; in some instances the bandaging was very carefully done, and the cloth was of a red colour in addition to the usual yellow-stained linen.

In addition to these, numerous small fishes have been discovered, and yet smaller insects, all carefully embalmed and deposited in the several tombs prepared to receive them.

In many cases the animals were placed in mummy-pots, in others simply bandaged and laid in the pits, and in only a few instances have they been put in cases like the human mummies.

These latter receptacles are of different kinds and shapes. The first, or cartonnage case, is composed of folds of linen cemented together and plastered with lime on the inside ; they are as firm as a board, and require to be sawed through in order to get at the body ; the shape corresponds to that of the human frame. On the head is represented a face, either male or female, and the features are often depicted in gold and colours. Some of these cases are very handsome, the colours with which they are decorated having retained their freshness and beauty in a most surprising manner. Red, blue, yellow, green, white and black are the colours to be found on the cases and on the walls of the tombs.

The second case is usually of sycamore, sometimes hewn out

of a solid trunk, sometimes composed of several pieces glued together, and fastened as the single trunk ones are with wooden pegs fitting into corresponding cavities, and thus closing the whole in the most perfect manner.

It was commonly supposed that the subject of the representation upon the cases was a history of the life of the person embalmed within, but Pettigrew asserts that this is inaccurate. The hieroglyphics are very similar in most cases, and usually begin with the same symbols. Pettigrew thinks that the subject of the book of the dead bears relation to the trial which the soul was to undergo, and the deities through whose intervention, or by whose intercession, it was to pass through the different stages of its progress towards another state of existence.

Sometimes three and even four cases were used, but this only in the instance of rich and distinguished persons. Occasionally the outer one was made of cedar, this being the least corruptible of woods and emblematic of eternity, the whole covered with a varnish that preserves it very effectually.

The bodies of kings were in an especial manner protected ; after being inclosed in the linen and wooden cases, they were deposited in sarcophagi of stone, marble, alabaster or granite, and these again were placed in tombs hewn out of the solid rock or constructed of various durable substances, where a great many of them remain until this day, defying as it were the power of time, though the cupidity of man has unearthed some of them from what ought to have been their last resting-place in the eternal habitations.

Most of the papyri found with the mummies contained the funerary ritual, either longer or shorter according to the rank of the person embalmed, but other subjects have been met with, such as chemistry or alchemy, one relating to the mysteries of the ancient Egyptians, another to astrology, an ode in praise of one of the Pharaohs, a laudatory account of the exploits of Rameses the Great, a history of part of the reign of Sesostris, the plan of a royal catacomb, and a very remarkable MS. relating to the sale of a portion of the offerings made from time to time on account, or for the benefit of, a certain number of mummies of persons described at length, in very bad Greek, with their children and all their households.

The more modern the mummy, the rarer the MSS., and the more careless the execution of them. Belzoni averred that

papyri were never found in the mummies that were placed in cases, only in those that were deposited in the tombs after having been bandaged, but this has been proved to be erroneous, a large number having been procured from cased mummies.

Numerous are the varied objects that have been found in the tombs. Buried with the deceased were the emblems of their professions. Loaves of bread near the mummy of a baker, paints and brushes beside an artist, instruments of surgery by a physician, bows and arrows by a hunter, a lance, a hatchet or a poignard by a soldier, the style and inkpot by a clerk, nets beside a fisherman, razor and stone by a barber; vases of pottery, wooden vessels of all kinds, baskets of fruits, seeds, &c.; a distaff in the cases of male mummies confirming the statement of Herodotus that men were employed in the manufacturing of cloth, whilst women were engaged in commerce. Combs of ivory and gold, vases of perfumes, mirrors, paint for the eyebrows with brush to apply it and other articles of the toilet have been discovered with the female mummies, not to mention the wonderful lady's wig with its multitudinous little curls and plaits as perfect as though just fresh from the barber's hands, discovered by the Rev. Greville Chester within the last few years and by him presented to the British Museum, showing that the fair sex from the earliest times were not above "making up" to enhance their charms.

What is perhaps more pathetic than all is a ball of skin composed of different colours and taken from the hand of the mummy of a little child who had been put to rest with its beloved playing closely grasped in the tiny fingers, to remain undisturbed for some three thousand years, and then to be torn from its owner by sacrilegious hands.

Amulets of every description are found in great profusion and some very fine jewellery, but no coins or money. Necklaces are found upon men as well as upon women. They are made of various substances, gold, enamel, glass, cornelian, shells, lapis lazuli, ivory, bronze, iron and enamelled earth, also earrings, bracelets, rings, girdles, pins for the head, tweezers, scissors, vestments, tunics, sandals of wood and skin, leaves of palm, shoes, mallets, nails, ladles, bronze keys, wooden pillows, wooden cisterns, knives in silex and wood, spoons, medicine chests, stools, musical reeds or pipes and bells are among the objects that have been unearthed.

Some of the female mummies are covered with ornaments of considerable value, the hair tastefully plaited and ornamented with spangles. As many as three necklaces were found on one mummy, composed of representations of the divinities, amulets, &c., in coral, lapis lazuli and other precious stones, and in gold, displaying great taste and fine workmanship. Earrings of fine gold, a scarabaeus set in gold as a ring for the forefinger of the left hand, an elegant girdle round the body matching the necklace, and a bracelet of fine pearls, precious stones and gold on the left wrist.

With this mummy there were three small alabaster vases, one containing a liquid balm or wash for the face, another perfume and the third some eyebrow paint with a bundle of cloth made like a brush to apply it, also a metallic mirror and a small cistern.

It is said that the Coptic ladies of the present day paint their eyebrows with the same sort of mineral matter which is found in these mummy vases.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that tomb breaking was rife in Egypt at a very early period when it was known the amount of treasures that were buried with the illustrious dead ; neither is it extraordinary that the Egyptians took such pains to conceal the resting-places of their kings.

All mummies were not bandaged, many had only the covering of a mat which surrounded them. Belzoni saw the bodies of two women lying on the ground in a corner of a chamber in one of the tombs in the valley of Biban-el-Molouk, without any bandages; they were well preserved, their hair long and flowing in tresses.

The quantity of bandages used in some mummies is stated to be more than one thousand yards; the Bedouins were in the habit of taking it away to make vestments, or to sell for the manufacture of paper for the grocers. The bandages on the priest Horsiesi weighed thirty five pounds and a half.

The bandages were either cotton or linen ; woollen were never used.

Some of the mummies had on chemises without sleeves, three feet eight inches in length and well made, the collar and sleeve holes being hemmed round with remarkable neatness ; round the bottom was a fringe an inch and a half in breadth, and one had been mended in several places.

Those mummies that have recently been discovered at Echmim, in Upper Egypt, seem to have been interred in the self-same clothes which they wore in life. Of course these are of much later date than the ancient Egyptian and Ptolemy-Greek ones, the tombs of which underlie the others at a considerable depth, but they are very interesting from the beautiful textiles of which their robes are composed. Except in rare cases these latter bodies were not mummied in the Egyptian manner nor swathed in bandages, they were simply buried in shallow graves dug in the sandy upper-soil overlying the tombs of the old Egyptians and Greeks. The extreme dryness of the climate, assisted by the natural salts contained in the soil, have reduced these bodies to a condition resembling leather, and upon them are found these interesting specimens of work, some of which are now to be seen in the South Kensington Museum and also in some private collections.

The piece of worsted work presented by Mr. Chester to the British Museum is a most interesting relic and in a remarkable state of preservation. The boat with the two figures resembles that of the ancient Egyptians, and the fabric is supposed to have been executed on the spot, or at all events in Egypt about the third century of the Christian era. The border, representing garlands of leaves, flowers and cupid's heads, is evidently Roman in design.

There are specimens of woven linen, embroidered linen, silk, cloth, a fabric resembling lace and worsted work. There is one piece in a private collection with a drawn thread, which is very curious, and some with quaint and extraordinary designs, among which the partridge is evidently a favourite.

Mr. Flinders Petrie discovered many specimens of this ancient worsted work in the Roman Cemetery, recently excavated by him, near Harvara, in the Fayoum; but they are in a much less perfect state of preservation than those found in the Necropolis of Panopolis. Another interesting relic Mr. Flinders Petrie has unearthed in Egypt is an angling hook of the ancient Egyptians, and he pronounces it to be at least four thousand years old. It bears a very close resemblance to the well-known Limerick hooks with one barb on the inner side.

A false tooth was also found a little while ago in one of the Egyptian tombs. Verily indeed there is nothing new under the sun.

Frequent deceptions have been practised in the manufacture of mummies. The Arabs at Gournou, finding it a profitable trade, make "mumma" to sell to the unwary purchaser. Mummies supposed to be true Egyptian are composed of the most veritable rubbish, but so cleverly done as to deceive even experienced collectors. Saw-dust, bundles of rags of various descriptions, a portion of stick to serve the place of the spine, the vertebræ of a cat mixed up with dust, bones of monkeys and other animals, are all used in making up these deceptive mummies. Around these figures are true Egyptian bandages taken off real mummies, and the faces are formed of linen covered with plaster of Paris and carefully made out. One traveller says that in some of the chambers of the tombs heaps of bones and pieces of linen such as described may be seen, and the Arabs are very expert at forming these fictitious mummies, several of which, put into real cases, have been sent to England. These men break open the real mummies contained in the tombs and inclosed within the most ornamented sarcophagi, to abstract from them the jewels that adorn them and the amulets and idols that are sometimes placed within the bodies ; they then substitute the fictitious for the original inmates.

Honey was used by some nations to embalm their dead ; the Assyrians placed bodies in it to preserve them from corruption. The Romans also used it for the same purpose. The body of Alexander the Great was embalmed with honey. Abd' Allatif relates that a man found a sealed cruise, and, having opened it, he discovered that it contained honey, which he began to eat, until one of his companions observed a hair upon his finger, when the vessel was more closely examined, and a little child, all perfect, was withdrawn from it. The body was well preserved and furnished with rich jewels and ornaments.

Other substances employed were wax, bitumen, resin, nitre, asphaltum, myrrh, cassia, cedar, different species of balm, powdered aromatics, colocynth, aloes and natron.

Perhaps the most curious thing about mummies is the rage for them as a drug in the sixteenth and part of the seventeenth centuries ; it was to be found in the shops of all apothecaries, and considerable sums of money were expended in the purchase of it, principally from the Jews in the East.

No sooner had it come into fashion as a medicine than the tombs were searched and as many mummies as could be obtained

were broken into pieces for the purpose of sale. The demand, however, was not easily supplied ; for the government of Egypt was unwilling to permit the transportation of the bodies from their sepulchral habitation. The consequence was, that the temptation to manufacture false mummies was irresistible. Some Jews entered into what turned out to be a lucrative speculation. They procured bodies of all descriptions that could be obtained, no matter of what they had died ; executed criminals, slaves, even those who had met their deaths from horrible and loathsome diseases such as the plague, leprosy, or smallpox, they cared not whence they came, whether they were old or young, or of what disease they had died, so long as they could obtain them, for when embalmed no one could tell them from genuine mummies.

Their mode of operation was to fill the head and inside of the bodies with simple asphaltum, an article of very small price ; they made incisions into the muscular parts of the limbs, inserted into them also the asphaltum and then bound them up tightly. This being done, the bodies were exposed to the heat of the sun ; they dried quickly, and resembled the truly prepared mummies. These were sold to the Christians.

Mummy was supposed to be a panacea for almost every disease under the sun, and was prescribed by some of the most eminent physicians ; it was to be taken in decoctions of marjoram, thyme, elder, barley, roses, lentils, jujubes, cummin seed, caraway, saffron, cassia, parsley, with oxymel, wine, milk, butter, castor and syrup of mulberries, and a horrible dose it must have been even though disguised under so many different flavours. The mummies of young girls were considered to be most efficacious, consequently they fetched the highest prices, and physicians were careful to direct their patients to procure the veritable Egyptian mummies.

However, all the doctors were not of the same mind regarding this disgusting drug ; some were bold enough to raise their voices against the wide-spread use of it. Grew said, " Let them see to it, that dare to trust to old gums, which have long since lost their virtue."

The demand for mummy was greater in France than in any other country ; François I. was in the habit of always carrying about with him a little packet containing some mummy mixed with pulverized rhubarb, ready to take upon receiving any injury

from falls or other accidents that might happen to him. Armed with this universal remedy, he thought himself secure against all danger.

A French physician, however, Ambrose Paré, did not place the same reliance upon it. He stated that neither the physicians who prescribed mummy, nor the apothecaries who sold it, nor the authors who wrote of it, knew anything of certainty respecting it ; he condemned its use in the following terms :

" This wicked kind of druggie, doth nothing helpe the diseased, in that case, wherefore and wherein it is administered, as I have tryed an hundred times, and as Thevet witnessess, he tryed in himselfe, when as hee tooke some thereof by the advice of a certaine Jewish physition in Egypte, from whence it is brought ; but it also inferres many troublesome symptomes, as the paine of the heart, or stomacke, vomiting, and stinke of the mouth. I, perswaded by these reasons, doe not onely myselfe prescribe any hereof to my patients, but also in consultations, endeavour what I may, that it bee not prescribed by others."

Most moderns would agree with the result arrived at by the famous chirurgeon.

The cessation of the use of mummy as a drug was due to the suspension of the traffic in false mummies. A Jew of Damietta had a Christian slave whom he ill-used because he would not embrace the true faith. The man retaliated by denouncing his master's nefarious practices in the manufacture of fraudulent mummies, with the result that the Jew was thrown into prison, and only released on paying a very large sum in gold. The governors of other cities in Egypt, delighted with the prospect of obtaining a great deal of money very easily, exacted a ransom from all those Jews who were merchants of mummies. From this time the traffic ceased ; the Jews, fearful of being subjected to a new oppression, dared no longer continue their trade.

The Arabs to this day make use of mummy powder for a medicine mixed with butter. It is esteemed a sovereign remedy for bruises both external and internal.

Pettigrew gives an interesting account of "mumiya ;" the bitumen or mineral pitch which flows down from the tops of mountains and mixing with the waters that carry it down coagulates, and exhales an odour resembling that of white (Burgundy) pitch and bitumen.

Sir William Ouseley visited the mummy mountain in the territory of Darábgerd in Persia. He fancied that it presented a darker appearance than the mountains adjacent to it. He describes the "mummy" as a blackish bituminous matter, which oozes from the rock, and is considered by the Persians as far more precious than gold, for it heals cuts and bruises, as they affirm, almost immediately; causes fractured bones to unite in a few minutes, and, taken inwardly, is a sovereign remedy for many diseases. Sir William quotes from a manuscript work of the tenth century in which the mountain is described, and states that the mummy was gathered for the king, and that numerous officers were commissioned to guard it; that once in every year they opened the door of the cavern, in which was a stone, perforated with a small hole, and in this the mummy was found collected.

The produce of the year amounted only to a portion of the size of a pomegranate, and it was sealed up in the presence of priests, magistrates, &c., and deposited in the Royal Treasury. Eastern princes, both giver and receiver, esteemed a very small portion as a present of considerable value.

In 1809, a portion of this mummy was sent to the Queen of England as a present from the King of Persia. The Empress of Russia received a like present, about an ounce in a gold box. A man at Isfáhán demanded nine tománs, about eight pounds sterling, and would not take less from a gentleman of Sir William Ouseley's party, for as much as could be contained within a common-sized walnut shell.

It was a popular opinion that the ancient Egyptians preserved the bodies of their princes and chief personages by means of the natural mummy, for which they afterwards substituted, under the same name, a compound aromatic balsam.

Among the things that have more recently been discovered are some flutes in the mummy case of a lady who died over three thousand years ago. These were displayed at the Royal Academy of Music on December 3rd, 1890, when Mr. T. L. Southgate read a paper entitled, "A Glance at the Music of the Ancient Egyptians."

A most interesting fact is that the diatonic scale can be produced on these venerable instruments, showing that the origin of the scale must go back past the Greeks to a much older civilization.

A. M. JUDD.

## The End of a Beginning.

By S. M. CRAWLEY BOEVEY.

AN August sun was sinking in the west and his attendant clouds had almost laid aside their robes of many colours. A tender grey was creeping up over the pinks and ambers that a short time ago delighted the eyes of all who saw with the love of beauty in their gaze, and there was a hush of coming night, broken only by the notes of a belated bird or the distant soft splash of sea waves.

It was a time of day that wooed many to linger in the flower and hay scented air before taking shelter in the house, and in the garden of a north-country vicarage sauntered a couple, each of whom was evidently too much absorbed in the other to notice eavesdroppers or onlookers. The one was young, with short yellow curls playing at will round an upturned face, that reminded one of wild rose petals. The other was older and taller, and his bent head threw the features into deep shadow.

"You have been three weeks home from school, Chérie," he was saying earnestly, "and there is no need for you to be toiling at lessons now that you have left—that you are eighteen. Surely you might spare a little more time for an old friend who has his orders for sea, and may not see you again for months—years—who knows?"

A smile broke in the listener's eyes and at the corners of her pouting red lips.

"Dear Hulbert," she answered, in half-coaxing tones of would-be apology, "you see, father does not want me to be like the girls about Sandyside. He says, lessons should only begin with school and go on through life ; besides——"

Hulbert Lassing kicked away a loose pebble with an impatient "pish!" and a frown clouded for an instant his good-tempered face.

"Nonsense, Chérie," he broke in, "nothing could make you like other girls, to my mind at least. Why, even in our games,

as children, long ago, I used to think you different. It is the same now, and—and—this is my last evening."

Here Hulbert's voice faltered, and the pair moved silently on to a walk bordered on either side by a trimly-cut yew hedge. There was a moss-grown sun-dial at the farther end with a wooden seat behind it, and till they reached this no more words were spoken. Chérie Nister was—truth to tell—grateful for the dim light, because of the unshed tears that filled her eyes, making speech difficult, but by the time she came to a standstill she had steadied her voice enough to use it.

"We shall meet again—this is not the first time you have left home for a voyage."

"Aye, but you are a woman now," pleaded Hulbert, "and Chérie, darling, one never knows what the future may have in store, so do not send me away without a few kind words just to remember till we see each other again. I do not want to bind you by any promise, for that would be neither right nor fair to you, just on the threshold, as it were, of a new life. Only it would make all the difference to me if——"

"I love you—you know it," murmured Chérie, staring hard at the sun-dial while she put a hand into Hulbert's restless ones, that tore a spray of yew to pieces, unconscious of the fact.

The words and action altered the face of the world to him in an instant. "Thank you," said he quietly, and he grasped the small white fingers that nestled under his own, as if he would have taken possession of them without further argument. "Now, why could you not have told me that half-an-hour ago, instead of putting me off about a dozen other things, and people who have no earthly interest for me, except so far as they concern you. This is all I wanted, and we will keep our own secret till—till——"

"What will your sisters think?" inquired Chérie, looking up suddenly into the face above. "You have so many, and they are so wise and old and big. I feel a little afraid of them."

Hulbert laughed gaily. "They are the kindest creatures possible, all the ten, which, I grant you, is an alarming number. But, you see, they haven't the least idea of our secret, thanks to their notion that you are still a child, perhaps, and it's best to keep it to ourselves, eh?"

"Chérie, Chérie, where are you?" called a shrill voice in the distance; "your father says there is a heavy dew to-night, and you ought not to be out without a shawl."

"God bless and keep you, my dearest," whispered Hulbert, snatching the girl to him for a long passionate kiss before she could free herself from his arms. "This is good-bye, for I leave by an early train to-morrow."

"Coming, mother," cried Chérie, as she flitted back along the yew walk in such a tumult of gladness and sorrow, it would have been hard to say which had the upper hand at first. "It is Hulbert's fault, for he wanted to see the sun-flowers under the south wall, and then he coaxed me to the old dial yonder, but it is too hot for wraps," and with a playful movement the speaker flung her white skirt over her shoulders.

Mrs. Nister was reassured by the sight of her only child, who slipped a hand coaxingly into the bend of the nearest arm when she had joined her mother. The latter was a faded reproduction of the former, in cap and spectacles, and, curiously enough, her mental vision was likewise in need of help where Chérie was concerned, for Mrs. Nister, like many parents, was not yet awake to the fact that her daughter had left childhood behind.

The Lassings of Easton lived three miles away, and succeeded the Nisters at the Rectory, when they went some years ago to Sandyside Vicarage. The families had always been on friendly terms, so that Hulbert's visits excited no more comment than those of his sisters, and Mr. Nister dozed over his *Times* that August evening as free from suspicion as his wife that anything unusual was taking place in the garden. Nevertheless, the vicar opened his eyes, and smoothed his silver-grey hair when he caught the sound of returning footsteps. For Chérie was as the very apple of the man's eye in virtue, firstly, of her own sweet self, and secondly, for her likeness to his pretty French mother, after whom she was named. The sound of steps meant to him that Chérie was coming into sight again; with the sunny curls and the gentle merry ways which made the girl such a general favourite, the marvel was that she showed no signs of being spoilt. There was only one shadow on Mr. Nister's joy in his treasure, and this he resolutely put aside when it crossed his mind. His much-loved mother was cut off early in decline, and

the granddaughter was perilously like her in colouring, though hitherto no special signs of delicacy had been noticed.

Hulbert bounded home that night as if he trod upon air, and merrily as he went rang out a song in rich bass notes, telling plainly enough to chance hearers that the world went well with the singer. And so in truth it did. The Lassings were people of comfortable means; Hulbert was the idol of a father and ten sisters, besides which he was blessed with health and a happy temper. It was as if Pandora had showered upon him the contents of her magic box, keeping nothing back to restrain the envy of the less-favoured.

The passers-by were few that summer night, for Hulbert chose a way across the deserted sands, where wavelets lapped softly upwards as if they had for a goal the little black boats grouped in rows along the shore. The sailor chose this way because the music of the sea made fit accompaniment to the melody in his heart, the title of which is known to most, high or low, and all agree in thankfulness for the sweetest music sent by heaven to brighten life on earth.

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Good-bye is a sorrowful word, and perhaps causes more tears than any other in the dictionary, though in it lie the germs of countless happy meetings.

The rector of Easton was old, and it made his heart ache to part with his only son, but his daughters resolutely wiped their eyes and set themselves with greater zeal than before to manage the affairs of the parish. It was a 'sensible way of taking the sting out of trouble, but then the Lassing ladies, or "the Lasses," as they were familiarly called, were eminently sensible. They were tall, plain women, with straggling, prominent teeth, and complexions like Gruyère cheese, women who were given over to kindly acts and good works of every sort, so that they were a distinct power in the place. If a concert were required, Miss Harry was ready to get it up, and were it not for the feminine title before the masculine abbreviation of Harriet, by which all Easton knew her, she might have been a man, for the energy with which she took things in hand. Miss Sue was a sure helper in every local bazaar, and Miss Lassing was famed for her power of organizing—in short, each sister had some

speciality, and lived together, on the whole, as peacefully as a brood of downy yellow ducklings.

The rector saw all this and was thankful for his daughters, but idolized his son. Indeed, after the light of Hulbert's presence left Easton his father's head was observed to droop a trifle more, though he went about the place as usual with open hand, words or smiles for all. There were many who felt for the Lassing sisters, and one who felt even more for the father, only he never knew this because the fact was carefully buried in silence.

Chérie Nister threw herself with gentle energy into life at home, and when from time to time she met Mr. Lassing, she glanced tenderly at the droop of the white head, understanding, perhaps better than most, what sunshine had gone with his son. There was a fund of reserve in the girl's nature underlying her open, playful manner, which prevented her noticing in words the rector's grief, and she always left him feeling something stronger for a sight of that brave old man. His grey eyes, deeply sunk below broad, massive brows, were the windows of a soul at once kindly and guileless as a child's. The cutaway coat, elaborate folds of a spotless tie, and tall hat formed a clerical attire that belonged to a past order of things. Yet they sat naturally on the rector of Easton, who was Conservative by instinct as well as education.

"Lassing is a grand fellow," people used to say, "and is as much above party as he is above fashion. If there were a few more like him the world might be a better one."

Summer days shortened and wind howled across the bleak moorland round Easton, as if in triumph that the reign of winter was at hand. Winter was apt to be a time of trouble on that part of the coast, for rocks and shoals helped gales to make many a shipwreck, and one part of the hilly churchyard was set aside for the strangers who were sometimes cast ashore with broken timber. Mr. Lassing shivered or sighed, when he thought himself unnoticed, at the sound of that merciless wind, for he knew it boded trouble to somebody; besides, was not Hulbert at sea, far away, with half the world between him and home?

The Lasses were too busy to fret themselves over dark possibilities. They worked, they sang, they chatted, with never idle fingers or tongues; so the winter months slipped peacefully

by, varied by the countless trifles that make the sum of an ordinary woman's life. Now and again a few sisters would walk to Sandyside, or Mrs. Nister drove to Easton to inquire the latest family news, though it was with a careworn face, and Chérie was seldom with her.

"Another cold," the mother explained, a line appearing, as she spoke, between her blue eyes, "and the doctor says she must take care. The child does not understand what that means, and her head is full of this Cambridge examination. Of course we are pleased for her to try, and her father is proud she should have the power as well as the wish. Still, still, I don't think myself she is strong enough for so much study, and what is the good of it all, seeing she will never have to work for her bread?"

"Oh, a cold is nothing to worry about," answered Harry, in the dogmatic tone of a person who knows all about things. "Patty and Con have half-a-dozen in as many weeks, and are none the worse after. Have some more tea?"

The anxious mother considered the subject dismissed by the tea question, nevertheless her fears were not soothed by this treatment of them, especially as Miss Harry was known to be as strong as a horse.

"It is certain that girl is not well," remarked Miss Lassing to her sisters, one evening when the days were drawing out again and summer birds returning from exile. "She looks almost transparent and is sadly thin, though as bright as possible. I don't hold with all this useless learning for our sex. We were taught enough for practical purposes, and what does she want with Greek and algebra?"

"Certainly," said Sue, who generally echoed her elder's opinion; "it's nonsense, dear. Depend upon it, women have no business with these things."

A sunshiny afternoon at the beginning of September, Harriet Lassing walked home after tea at a friend's house, and her way lay through Sandyside. The lady's long legs advanced with the regularity of a grenadier's march, and her brown, mushroom-shaped hat sat, all unconsciously to its wearer, at the back of her head instead of in front. She held a spray of lapageria, the pure waxy blooms of which had just been given to her for an invalid at Easton, whose greatest pleasure was in flowers of every kind. As Harry passed the Vicarage at Sandyside, a sudden

thought made her turn through the front gate to inquire after Chérie, and while she stood waiting for an answer to the bell it struck her as strange that the blinds should be down.

"They cannot be away," thought the caller, "for we saw them three days ago, and they said nothing about it. Ah!—the sun, of course—these windows face south-west."

Meditation was here cut short by the door's opening, and the eyes of the maid who opened it were swollen with many tears. The visitor's heart stood still, and in a kind of gasp the question burst from her lips :

"What is the matter?"

Like rain descended the other's tears once more, and she put up a corner of her apron to wipe them away, while she answered in faltering tones :

"Our Miss Chérie—she was took quite sudden-like scarce two hours ago. The doctor said something about her brain, but I don't rightly understand. Missis is distraught, and poor master looks as if he'd got his death-blow."

Now the listener was one of those vigorous women to whom sickness seems rather a contemptible frailty, besetting the unlucky ones of her sex, and death a distant possibility only dwelt upon by the morbid-minded. With her keen enjoyment in the present and her freedom from ailment, Miss Harry could not, despite the best will in the world, sympathize with the dark side of life, and holding out her flowers to the servant, she exclaimed :

"Dear me, how sad! Put these on the body, will you? I shall write to Mrs. Nister to-morrow, and must hurry home now, for it is getting so late. I'm very sorry for you all, Nanny."

Nanny's rejoinder, if she had any to make, was choked in sobs. She had lived with the Nisters since Chérie's birth, took the joys and sorrows of the Vicarage household for her own, and was in consequence looked upon as a necessary portion of that household.

"Some folks is hard made and some soft," muttered she, shutting the door, from which it may be gathered that the departing caller was no favourite with Nanny.

The Lassing sisters wrote in turn to Hulbert as a kind of sacred duty, not to mention the pleasure, and in the next letter its writer casually mentioned Chérie's unexpected death among other items of home news. It is fair to add that nobody at

Easton knew Hulbert's secret, which was only guessed by the mourning mother at Sandyside because his name was the last word on her daughter's lips. A reply was long in coming, and instead of making it, as usual, public property, Polly, the favourite sister, to whom it was addressed, read it to herself in silence.

"Hulbert has been ill," she said presently, "very ill," and, bit by bit, the whole truth leaked out to satisfy curiosity, which showed itself in countless questions. Mr. Lassing said least and perhaps felt most.

"Poor lad," said he tenderly. "Well, most of us have to go through it some time, and there's plenty of life before him, so he'll get over it."

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Seven years passed, and once more came the rare unwelcome tidings of Hulbert's sickness. It was fever, and he must go home to recruit, being unfit for service. The Lasses welcomed their brother with mixed feelings, for he was a mere wreck of his former self, and careful nursing for an indefinite time would be needed to restore health, to say nothing of strength.

In the early days of summer Hulbert returned to Easton, where love and attentions of every kind were lavished upon him, but alas! in vain. Through the long sunny days he lounged in the garden, or crept about his old haunts with the same ready smiles and words as usual; yet it became clear to all that he grew gradually, steadily worse, instead of better. Presently the garden had to be exchanged for the sofa, and then he became too weak to leave his room, though the sick man's interest never flagged in all that went on. The Lasses clung to this as a good sign, hoping against hope; and Polly was the only one who knew that though Chérie Nister's name never passed Hulbert's lips, she was seldom absent from his thoughts.

"Polly can hold her tongue," he used to say, "and that's a rare virtue with women."

June roses shed their petals in scented showers along the Rectory garden; hay was carried and corn crops turned to gold in the eye of the August sun. Still Hulbert lingered, as though loth to leave a world that held for him so much beauty and love. But the tall, fine form was wasted, breathing became laboured with the least exertion, and it wrung the hearts of the watchers to see how low the sands of life were running.

"Don't fret, girls," whispered the invalid after a more restless night than usual, "and you need not walk about as if you had list round your shoes, for noise does not hurt me."

This mild effort at a joke did not raise a smile on Polly's face as she sat by the window knitting warm stockings for the brother who would never wear them. She glanced up with eyes full of woe, rather surprised at the sudden breaking of a silence which had lasted so long that she hoped Hulbert was asleep.

"We will not fret, dear," she said gently, "for father's sake," and Polly meant it, though she hurriedly passed a hand across her eyes because there was a dimness in them, the dimness of gathering tears, which had sprung up unbidden, and must not be allowed to fall.

A little to the left of the bed, on a carved bracket, stood a clock, and to this Hulbert constantly turned, as if waiting till the hand reached a wished-for hour. "What day is this?" he inquired presently, and the words were so faint that Polly dropped her work in her lap to listen.

"The third of September," was the reply.

"Ah, the day my Chérie went—and—it is nearly eleven—she died then. It is time for me to go—she is waiting."

Before this broken speech ended Polly was stooping over her brother with heart beating wildly in an agony of fear, and the next minute she pulled the bell-rope. At once, from different parts of the house at the sound of that startling peal, crept the sisters; and Mr. Lassing, with bowed head, knelt close to his most treasured child, speechless, though the tightly-clasped hands and moving lips showed that he was absorbed in prayer.

Slower, fainter, came the gasping breath, and Hulbert glanced on all who waited round him, though he seemed unable to do more. The morning sun streamed unchecked through a wide open window and bathed the dying man in a flood of light—birds were singing, all nature spoke of joy, as if chiding the short-sightedness of human sorrow, and the Lasses stood on without word or tear at Hulbert's side. Soon—very soon—the clock struck, and each deep bell-like note was as a knell to the hopes of the listeners: to all, indeed, except one, over whose face flickered a gladsome smile.

"Chérie," whispered he, and his eyes wandered for an instant to the window, as if they saw beyond the sunshine that entered

there. Then they closed, but the smile remained, and so gently did the spirit leave the body that the watchers lingered for some time before they certainly knew their brother was at rest.

Not many hours later Mrs. Nister called to inquire, and, by a curious coincidence, she too sent up the flowers she happened to be carrying, that they might be laid on the body of the man her daughter loved. The flowers were chiefly sprays of lapageria, and, as Mrs. Nister turned away in tears from the house of mourning, her first thought was of the happy meeting in the land beyond the veil, where love has its full fruition.

When spring next woke the world to life a tombstone was seen in Easton churchyard, the exact counterpart of another three miles off at Sandyside. In the words upon them there was a trifling difference, the name on the former one being Hulbert, and on the latter Chérie. At this people whispered much and wondered a little ; only, since it concerned them not, explanation is needless. Besides, since this visible life ends for the most part with a tombstone, it is time that we lay aside the pen and say no more.

NOTE.—The truth of the above can be vouched for by the writer.

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## Into Temptation.

By A. PERRIN.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. PIERCE'S VISIT.

"Take a straw and throw it up into the air, and you may see by that which way the wind is."—*J. Selden*.

WHEN the Careys returned from church they were amazed to find me sitting in the garden, deep in conversation with a stranger ; but when I introduced him as the Mr. Pierce who had corresponded with Mr. Carey over my affairs, they at once invited him to stay "and share their mid-day meal," as they called their one o'clock dinner.

So Tom was hunted for, and made to put in an unwilling appearance, for he had all a school-boy's horror of visitors ; and then we trooped into the dining-room and took our places round the table, including Patty Carey the elder child, who was allowed to have her dinner downstairs on Sundays.

I sat silent as Mr. Carey began sawing sadly away at the enormous joint of roast beef in front of him. I was thinking of the first time I had been in that room—how Andrew had placed a chair for me next his own, and how he had found fault with the Carey children, whose sticky fingers I vividly remembered, as well as a hundred other trifles that I had never thought of since. What ages ago it seemed ! And yet it was barely a year.

My recollections were brought to an abrupt conclusion by a scream from Miss Patty, who unfortunately was seated next to Tom, an opportunity he had taken advantage of, to confiscate her silver mug, untie her blue silk sash, and help her largely to salt, until her pent-up feelings found relief in a yell.

"Patty !" exclaimed Mrs. Carey reproachfully, who had not noticed the tricks Tom had been up to. And finding herself unjustly reproved, poor Patty's face screwed itself up for a cry, which was only warded off by the timely removal of Tom to a seat next my own, after which all went well for a time. Mr.

Pierce talked principally to me. Mr. Carey's attention was so engrossed in his carving, and his wife's with the manner in which Patty was holding her spoon, that conversation with either of them was rather up-hill work.

I had a great many questions to ask about our mutual friends at Kuttahpore, and learnt that Mrs. Herring and Chatty had gone to Simla soon after I left, just for the hot season, where nobody returned their calls, much to their rage and indignation.

How the Argles had at last been transferred to a large station, and how she had departed from Kuttahpore in delight, leaving poor Mr. Cassell, without the slightest compunction, to pine away in grief.

How little Mr. Costello had nearly died owing to a surfeit of native vegetables, and how the new collector had kept on old Nazuf Ali and altered and improved our house beyond recognition.

"What made you come down here so soon?" I asked. "Are you staying with relations?"

For the first time during my acquaintance with Mr. Pierce, I saw him change colour and look rather embarrassed.

"I had never seen Bournemouth," he said, "and I thought you would probably be down here; so I came to look you up."

"It was very good of you," I said, feeling sure that there was something more in Mr. Pierce's visit to Bournemouth than the object of seeing the place and looking me up, but as he seemed reserved on the subject, I refrained from asking any more questions, though I was burning with curiosity.

Perhaps he was engaged to some girl in the place. Nothing else would bring a man down so far from London directly he landed, unless his relations lived there, which I knew was not the case.

Somehow the idea did not please me. I was certain very few girls would be good enough for Mr. Pierce, and he was sure to throw himself away on some little fool who was incapable of appreciating him. I began to consider myself rather injured and hurt that he had not confided in me, after having allowed me to lay bare all my thoughts and feelings to him.

"Mother, mother," said Patty, interrupting something Mrs. Carey was saying to Mr. Pierce, "may I go on the sands tomorrow?" "No," put in Tom, and Patty glared viciously at him while she continued to repeat her request.

"Perhaps, dear," said her mother, turning round, "if it's fine. I don't see why we shouldn't all go out and have a little picnic."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Won't you come too, Mr. Pierce, or would it be too stupid for you?"

Most likely he would refuse, he would want to be with "the girl;" but to my surprise he said he should be delighted, and it was arranged that he should come up and join us at the house the following afternoon.

"It may not be fine," croaked Mr. Carey.

"Oh," said Patty, with a long face, "I hope it won't rain."

"You must ask God to make it fine, in your prayers to-night," said Mrs. Carey gravely.

"But, mother," replied Patty, "I asked God to make it fine last time we were going to have tea out of doors, but it was so wet."

"You'd better ask the devil this time, then," said Tom, unable to resist the remark after it had occurred to him, and making no attempt to conceal his satisfaction at the horror depicted on the faces of the Carey family.

I wondered what Mr. Pierce meant to do after dinner; I could hardly expect him to stay any longer, and yet I felt I had not seen half enough of him in spite of the fact that he was coming with us the next day. It was so nice meeting him again, and he seemed to like me very much better now than he had done at Kuttahpore, where he had always been finding fault with me. As it was, he had not said one disagreeable thing since he had arrived at the Vicarage.

"Are you coming to afternoon service, Josephine?" inquired Mrs. Carey, as we rose from the table when dinner was over.

"I think I ought to go and see Aunt Addie," I said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Pierce hurriedly, "would you mind my coming too? I should like to know your aunt so much."

"Of course," I replied, rather surprised at this intense desire to make Aunt Addie's acquaintance; "we may as well walk, it's not very far."

"You couldn't take the carriage out on Sunday, anyway," said Mrs. Carey reprovingly; "and what about Tom? Will you take him with you, or will he come to church with us?"

Mrs. Carey very rarely actually addressed Tom, which incensed him against her more than ever; his dignity was easily hurt, and he

had never forgiven her for omitting to ask him to tea, as well as myself, nearly a year ago.

"I think I should prefer *not* to go to church with Mrs. Carey," he said, pointedly addressing me; "I intend to go for a walk by myself." And giving the unlucky Patty a flick with his nails on the top of her head, which caused her to scream with fury, he left the room to follow his own devices.

"I'm afraid Tom's manners are very bad," I said apologetically, as we all went out into the garden.

"He's sure to get on in the world," remarked Mr. Pierce drily; "he seems to have plenty of cheek, and there's nothing like it for fighting one's way."

We sat in the garden till it was time for afternoon church, when the Careys went into the house to put on their things, and Mr. Pierce and I were left alone.

"Shall I go and get ready to start for Ivy Villa?" I said lazily, without moving.

"No," said Mr. Pierce, tilting his hat over his eyes, "there's plenty of time."

"Don't you want to go and see any one else here?" I inquired.

"Any one else?" echoed Mr. Pierce. "Is that a hint for me to go?"

"No," I answered half laughing; "but I don't think you've treated me quite fairly. I've told you everything about myself, and you've never said a word to me about your own life."

"My father was a colonel in a cavalry regiment, and my mother was a lady. I was educated at Harrow, and got into the Bengal Civil Service. I've got two old maid sisters, and my parents are both dead. So there! And now what has that got to do with my wanting to call on any one but your aunt?"

"I thought there *must* be somebody else."

"Why?"

"Oh! Because a man doesn't rush down to a place like this directly he lands, for nothing."

I felt I was pumping him in the most unwarrantable manner.

"But I haven't come down here for nothing," said Mr. Pierce.

"Then there *is* some one!" I exclaimed eagerly.

"What do you mean?"

"There now!" I said crossly, for the mystery annoyed me

intensely ; " you're just as aggravating as ever. You wouldn't have come all this way just to see Bournemouth, or merely on the chance of finding me here. I might have been at the North Pole for all you knew. You must be engaged to somebody down here."

Mr. Pierce burst out laughing.

" What a mass of curiosity you are ! " he said.

" But tell me. *Are you ?*"

" I'll tell you to-morrow," he said.

My spirits sank. There was something intensely mortifying to me in the idea of Mr. Pierce being engaged, and now he had as good as admitted the fact.

Why had he told me nothing about the girl who was to be his wife, or offered to introduce her to me ? My feelings were deeply hurt, my curiosity baffled and, I could not but own it to myself, my jealousy aroused. I should not have minded it at all, I thought, if he had been open with me, and told me all about it from the first, but he had behaved abominably in keeping it all so quiet, and I considered that I had every right to feel very much offended. I rose from my seat and announced stiffly that I meant to get ready to go to Ivy Villa, and joined him afterwards in front of the house in anything but an amiable temper. I resisted the temptation to ask him more questions, telling myself that his affairs possessed no interest for me at all, since he was evidently so adverse to my knowing anything about them.

We talked very little as we sauntered slowly along in the direction of Ivy Villa. Mr. Pierce was never a talkative man, and the mood I was in, combined with the sultry heat and glare of the white road, disinclined me for conversation.

We found Aunt Addie being paraded about the garden in her bath chair, with a long gauze veil tied over her hat and flowing voluminously round her.

Directly she caught sight of us she began coughing feebly, and allowed one hand to droop gently down outside the chair, as if the effort to hold it up was too great for her frail strength.

" Oh ! how d'you do ? " she said faintly, as I introduced Mr. Pierce. " I am *such* an invalid, as I daresay my niece has told you, that I am unable to move from my chair, so you must excuse

my talking to you out here. You must walk about by the side of the chair, both of you, as I shall catch cold unless I keep moving."

Mr. Pierce and I stationed ourselves one on each side of Aunt Addie's chair, and slowly perambulated up and down the gravel walks while we talked to her.

"And what are you doing in England?" she asked Mr. Pierce, somewhat suspiciously. "I cannot understand any one in his right mind voluntarily leaving the heat of India to come into this abominable climate."

"One must have a change sometimes," said Mr. Pierce apologetically, for Aunt Addie had spoken in the most hostile tone, as if daring him to contradict her, and I was sure she was quite disappointed that he had not done so.

"How long do you stay at Bournemouth?" she inquired.

"It depends on circumstances," said Mr. Pierce, with a mysterious air, which enhanced Aunt Addie's curiosity to an almost unbearable extent.

"Really! and with whom are you staying?" she went on inquisitively.

"I'm at an hotel," said Mr. Pierce.

"Oh! and have you many friends here?"

"Not many."

Aunt Addie was furious. For some reason of her own she desired to find out all she could about Mr. Pierce, and having her curiosity baffled, annoyed her extremely.

"Dear me!" she said presently, "how very silly of me! I've forgotten my smelling-bottle. I can't imagine how I was so foolish, for I so often faint from exhaustion that it's most dangerous for me to be without it." She paused, and looked at Mr. Pierce, and then said in a feeble voice:

"*Might I trouble you to go into the house for it, Mr. Pierce?* It's on the drawing-room table; but please remember to shut the hall door behind you as you come out."

Mr. Pierce went off on his errand, and Aunt Addie attacked me about him at once.

"Who is he?"

"He was under Andrew at Kuttahpore, and was very kind in helping me to wind up my affairs when he died."

"Oh! well, all I can say is you ought to be more careful."

It's most imprudent, not to say improper, his coming here to see you, and your letting him walk all over the place with you. I never heard of such a thing! If you intend to marry him, say so at once, but don't expect me to take that awful boy Tom back, for I won't do it; I should die in a month."

Aunt Addie became decidedly incoherent, and began sniffing angrily at her smelling-bottle, which she had known perfectly well was in her lap all the time.

"You need not be nervous, Aunt Addie," I said quickly, for Mr. Pierce was returning from his fruitless search in the house. "Mr. Pierce does not want to marry me, and whatever happens you shall never be burdened with Tom again."

"I'm very glad my fears were unfounded, my dear Josephine," said Aunt Addie tearfully. "I could never bear to see you the wife of that murderous-looking individual. I hope he isn't a thief in disguise. If he's taken anything out of the drawing-room ——"

"I couldn't find the bottle, and I see you have it in your hand," said Mr. Pierce, behind the chair, in the middle of her speech, and Aunt Addie gave a loud scream of fright and surprise, as she had not seen him approaching.

I felt irresistibly inclined to laugh, and seeing by the expression of his face that Mr. Pierce was in the same condition as myself, I hastily said good-bye, promising to look in again soon.

"It's much too early to go in yet," he said, as we closed the gate behind us; "are you up to a walk?"

"Oh, yes; I'm quite strong again now; I should like a short walk."

We strolled along in silence for a few minutes.

"Mr. Pierce," I said presently, moved by a sudden impulse, "won't you tell me who you are engaged to?"

"I'm not engaged at all," he said quietly.

I stood still and stared at him.

"Why, you told me you were."

"I beg your pardon. If you will think for a moment, you will remember that I never made any such statement."

This was said with more of the old disagreeable inflection in his voice than I had heard all day.

"I certainly thought you were, but I'm very glad to hear you are not," I said, in a tone of satisfaction.

"You are glad? Why?"

I hardly knew what to say.

"I think it would be difficult for you to find any one to suit you."

"Do you think I should be hard to get on with?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes; I do think so. You would expect too much of your wife. She would have to be an absolute prig to please you."

I knew this was an untrue, as well as a disagreeable, speech, but I could not resist it. Mr. Pierce's perfections were the one thing about him that aggravated me.

"I don't see what grounds you have to go on for such an idea," he said, rather resentfully. "I don't think I am more intolerant than my fellow-creatures."

"Yes, you are," I said, with an air of conviction, feeling a delight in finding fault with him; "you have no sympathy with people who have less strength than yourself to resist doing wrong."

As I said this a scene rose up in my mind of two figures, myself and Mr. Pierce, pacing the gravel walk outside the collector's house at Kuttahpore, and I could hear his kind honest voice saying, "Poor child, I'm awfully sorry for you."

If there was no sympathy in that tone, then there was none in the world at all, and I looked away towards the sinking sun, feeling sorry for what I had said, all the more so as I was afraid I might have hurt Mr. Pierce very deeply.

"I have no means of proving that you are wrong just at present," he said, rather coldly; "and perhaps you are right. One never knows one's own faults as well as other people do."

Apparently my words had fallen harmlessly enough. I was glad I had not offended him, but with my usual, unaccountable perversity, I felt a little disappointed that he had not been angry. It was such a novel experience to lecture Mr. Pierce, and I had enjoyed doing it immensely, though I was afraid to pursue my advantage any further.

We had walked idly along, not noticing where we were going,

till we found ourselves opposite the Vicarage porch, under which Tom was standing, so our *tête-à-tête* came to an abrupt end, for Tom, having overcome his shyness of the visitor, attached himself to us until Mr. Pierce said good-bye, and went off, promising to put in an early appearance the next afternoon.

### CHAPTER XXXV.

#### NOW OR NEVER.

"To be, or not to be ; that is the question."—*Shakespeare*.

I WOKE up the next morning to find that it was a hopelessly wet day.

Our outing was knocked on the head, and of course Mr. Pierce would never think of coming to the house, knowing that it would be impossible to carry out the programme. Patty was almost in tears all the morning over her disappointment, and Tom made her worse by perpetually suggesting that her not having said her prayers properly must be the cause of the wet day ; until Mr. Carey, roused out of his usual stern apathy, ordered him to be silent, and threatened to make him do some Latin, which had the effect of quickly ridding us of his presence. Where he went we neither asked nor cared to know : we were only too thankful to get rid of him. Mrs. Carey settled herself in the dining-room with an enormous basket of mending in front of her, meaning to make the most of the wet day. She must have found me anything but an agreeable companion, for I kept going to the window every five minutes to see if there was any chance of the rain clearing off ; but it looked hopeless, and poured steadily down in a continuous soaking torrent.

"I suppose there's no chance of Mr. Pierce coming," I said, with a little hesitation.

"My dear Josephine, no one would dream of coming out on a day like this. If he comes here to-morrow we must plan another excursion."

The morning dragged on as if it would never come to an end, and when, at last, dinner was ready, none of us were hungry (except Tom), through having had no fresh air or exercise to give us an appetite.

"I think I *must* go out for a walk," I said in desperation, when

three o'clock came and still no break in the clouds. "Will you come with me, Tom?"

"No," said Tom bluntly; "I'd rather not."

So I was forced to set out alone, and, clothed in a water-proof coat and a felt hat, I marched rapidly down the road, regardless of the rain, and only too thankful to get out into the air.

Presently a cab passed me and then stopped, and looking back I saw Mr. Pierce with his head out of the window, hailing me energetically.

"Where on earth are you going?" he said, opening the cab door. "You'll be drenched! I was on my way up to see you. Do get in and let me take you back."

"No," I said firmly; "I came out for a walk and I must have some exercise."

"Then I'll come too," he said, getting out and paying the cabman. "I've got a mackintosh here."

He put it on and we started off briskly.

"Do you know, such an awful thing's happened," he said. "Young Daintry has shot himself at Monte Carlo."

"What!" I exclaimed in horror. "It can't be true."

"I'm afraid it is. It's in some of the papers already, and I heard of it through a friend of mine who was there. You know he took six months' leave? Well, he went straight there and gambled night and day, they say, and now this is the result. I suppose he couldn't meet his losses, or something of that kind; I don't know exactly what. You know, nice boy as he was, he was always inclined to be wild."

"I suppose he must have been," I said with a sigh, "but somehow I never believed it. I always thought his brother misjudged him; anyway, I think if his mother had been fonder of him he might have had more chance."

I told Mr. Pierce of the conversation I had had with poor Douglas that night in Mrs. Argles' verandah.

"I saw him walking home with you," said Mr. Pierce.

"And I wished you had not been outside your house at that particular moment," I remarked.

"Did you? Why?"

"I thought you might think it so queer to see me walking with Mr. Daintry in the middle of the night."

"Did you mind what I should think individually, or would it have been the same if Mr. Costello had seen you, for instance?"

"I suppose I minded you more than Mr. Costello," I said laughing.

"How much longer do you intend to stay down here?" he asked presently.

"I must stay till Tom goes, I suppose. He wants to go in a few days to stay with some schoolfellow for the rest of the holidays. Directly he gets off, I shall pack up my own traps."

"Where do you mean to go?"

"To London, of course," I answered joyously. "Do you suppose I could stay on here with seventeen hundred a year and absolute independence? Why, it would drive me mad."

"And when you get to London?"

"Oh, I've promised myself the most *perfect* existence. I mean to take a flat and furnish it. I have made all my plans. I shall stay in London till I'm tired of shopping, and going to the theatre, and sight-seeing, and then I shall shut up my flat and be off to Paris."

There was no response. I looked up at Mr. Pierce, but his face was set and hard, and he evidently strongly disapproved of my scheme.

We had arrived on the brink of the cliff, and seeing a little narrow path that led down to the sands, I suggested that we should follow it.

"I like to look at the sea in the rain," I said.

"The sands will be so wet," objected Mr. Pierce.

"We can't be wetter than we are already," I urged, "and when we get down there we may find some dry place under the cliff where we can sit down."

I began to climb down the path, Mr. Pierce following me with his eyebrows drawn into a ferocious frown till they met over his nose. He was apparently thinking deeply over something, for he never offered to assist me in my descent. Probably he was preparing a lecture on my frivolous tastes, which I should get the full benefit of when we reached level ground again.

At the foot of the path was a tiny cave in the cliff, which looked as if it had been made for two people to take shelter in, and I entered it and sat down on the dry sandy floor to watch Mr. Pierce coming down the path I had just left.

"Come in here," I called out ; "it's beautifully dry, and you can see the sea splendidly."

He entered the little cave and threw himself down on the ground by my side, without considering the fine golden sand which stuck to his damp clothes wherever they touched it.

"We shall catch our deaths of cold," he grumbled. "What on earth would your aunt say if she could see us ?"

"Seeing me here wouldn't affect her in the least, so long as we didn't expect her to join us," I said. "That's one of the great comforts of my present existence, that I can do exactly what I please without causing trouble to a soul. You can never really enjoy yourself when you have other people's feelings to consider."

"You're talking nonsense," said Mr. Pierce crossly.

"It's exactly what you said to me yourself one day at Kuttah-pore."

"I was in a very different state of mind then to what I am now."

"Well, you can't expect me to suit my conversation to your moods, now, can you?"

I spoke in a light chaffing tone, but he did not smile or answer me back as I had expected. He was leaning his cheek on his hand and looking straight out across the tossing green and white sea before us.

"What are you thinking about ?" I asked.

"I've got something to say to you," he replied, "and I was wondering if I had better say it now, or wait till my leave is nearly over."

"Say it now, by all means, unless it's something very disagreeable."

"Don't be flippant, Josephine ; it's something serious."

I looked quickly at him. He had called me by my Christian name, a thing he had never done before. What *could* he be going to tell me ?

"Please say it quickly," I said, feeling rather frightened. "You're making me quite uncomfortable."

"It's this, then," he said, looking me straight in the face. "Will you marry me ?"

I was struck dumb with amazement. It had never crossed my mind that Mr. Pierce would ever propose to me. I had always been under the impression that he liked me well enough, but at

the same time rather despised me for my weakness and selfishness ; for I knew he could read my character like an open book.

And now here he was asking me to be his wife ! I was conscious at first of a wave of triumph and elation passing through my mind, in which there was mingled a certain amount of genuine gladness ; but I was too surprised to speak, and absolutely did not know whether I wished to accept him or not.

" Well ? " he said presently, never taking his eyes off my face.

" Do you *mean* it ? " I asked incredulously.

" Is it likely that I, of all men, should ask you such a question if I did not really mean it ? " he said with a little gesture of impatience. " I have known my own mind about you ever since I first saw you, and God only knows what I have gone through to hide it, and yet you ask me if I mean it ! "

" It seems so impossible."

" What ? That you could marry me ? "

" No ; your wanting me to be your wife. I thought you looked down on me, especially since—since that evening at the HERRINGS ! "

" Dear," he said gently, " don't think about that wretched business ; I understood it all perfectly, and though you were wrong——"

" Yes, that's just it," I exclaimed quickly. " You would always know when I was wrong and tell me, and I should never feel at my ease with you. You are much too good for me, and knowing how good you are, and how much better than myself, my life would be one long struggle to live up to your level. I couldn't do it ; I should end by being afraid of you and deceiving you."

" Josephine ! How foolish you are. You would have endless faults to correct in me," he said gravely.

" No. That is the worst of you. You don't seem to have any. It would be like living with a clergyman."

He laughed out loud.

" How blind you are ! " he said. " You must like me a little bit to think me such a mass of perfection. Don't you know that I've got the vilest temper on the face of the earth ? "

" Then you manage to control it very easily."

" Indeed, you little know," said Mr. Pierce wearily. " There seems something childish in a man of my age and experience

having to do battle with his own temper to the extent I have to sometimes. I despise myself because I can't master it as I should like to."

"If you weren't an exceptionally good man you wouldn't try. Who ever thinks about their temper?"

"You don't understand what I mean. I try to conquer my failings by strength of will, and because I will not be beaten by them, and that is a sin in itself, because it is doing right from a wrong motive. I do what is right very often because I *will not* be conquered by temptation. It's such miserable weakness not to be able to hold out against oneself! You seem to have an idea that I'm a kind of walking sermon, when I'm fully conscious that nine times out of ten I do what is right, not so much from the *desire* to do so, as to prove that I have the force of will to carry out by myself what many others can only do with the help of their religion. It is hard to explain, without seeming *utterly* irreligious, which I don't think I am, or the matter would not trouble me."

I looked doubtfully at him. I could not make out whether this was a confession of weakness or a parade of strength of mind. At any rate it made no difference in my feelings. I knew I was unwilling to accept him, and yet I could not make up my mind to refuse him. If I let him go I might find myself longing and craving to see him, and be near him again, and if I married him my own will would be gone for ever, his was so infinitely stronger than mine; and besides this I should have to give up my freedom, and my money, and the delights I had promised myself, and go back to be buried alive at Kuttahpore. Would Mr. Pierce make up for it all?

"Kuttahpore is so awful," I said, after a long silence.

"That is very easily remedied," he said. "I could get a transfer at once, and am pretty sure of getting a good district. Will you come back with me or not?"

Partly from curiosity I longed to put my hand in his and tell him I would be his wife. I could not help wondering what he would do, and how he would look. I could hardly believe he was in love with me, and yet there shone a clear earnest light in his eyes that made my heart beat, and kept me from uttering the "no" that hovered on my lips.

It would be so hard to give up my long-dreamt-of indepen-

dence, to forego my flat and my luxurious travelling, and all I had meant to see and do.

I was sure I could never be a model wife to any man, but at the same time I felt certain that Mr. Pierce was the only man I could marry if I did so again at all. If I accepted him, either he or I must be miserable, I in straining to be good enough for him, or he in seeing me indulge my weaknesses and yield to my temptations.

"Look here, Josephine," he said, "I have taken you by surprise, I can see, though I thought when I spoke that you knew I cared about you. Think it over till to-morrow. You can meet me here if you like, or anywhere, and give me your answer. If you refuse me I shall go back to India at once, for I shall need the hardest work I can do, but if you accept me I could extend my furlough for six months beyond what I have taken if you wished it."

He took both my hands in his.

"Do you care for me at all, dear?" he said.

"Oh! how can I tell?" I cried, the tears welling into my eyes. "One minute I feel as if I couldn't live without you, and the next I think it would be madness to give up my freedom and all my plans. Must I decide now? Won't you let me wait a year before I give you my answer?"

"No, I will not wait a year, Josephine, or even a week. If you don't know your own mind by to-morrow, I don't think you ever will. You know me thoroughly, and if you like your money and your freedom too well to give them up till a year has passed, you must let me go. You cannot cultivate the good you have in you by going away to gratify every desire and whim of the moment, and the more you cultivate the bad the less you will like the idea of the kind of life I have to offer you. I love you very dearly, but you must either give yourself to me now without the shadow of a doubt, or you must let me go."

I felt exceedingly angry with him, and almost refused him then and there. It was most humiliating to be denied my request for a year to think the matter over (or, to be strictly honest, to enjoy myself), and to be told point-blank that if I could not make up my mind then, he would not have me at all.

I could not bring myself to refuse him and decide my fate

then and there, so I finally agreed to meet him the following afternoon at the edge of the cliff, where the path ran down to the little cave, and give him an answer one way or the other, and then we walked back in the still pouring rain to the Vicarage.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## YES OR NO?

"Look, then, into thine heart."—*Longfellow.*

WE walked back in silence to the Vicarage, where Mr. Pierce left me, after we had arranged to meet again the following evening at the edge of the cliff where the little path led down to the cave. It was characteristic of him that, since my decision was yet un-made, he never pressed my hand at parting, or showed by even a look or sign that he had just asked me to be his wife. I had almost expected that he might want to kiss me as we stood there in the shadow of the porch, rendered still gloomier by the cloudy sky and steadily falling rain. I felt it would have gone a long way in my mind towards turning the scale in his favour, but he was evidently determined that my decision should be due to no sudden impulse or emotion of the moment; my choice was to be deliberate and voluntary.

And so we calmly said good-bye to one another, and I went up to my room to change my wet things, after which I sat on my bed for nearly an hour thinking over my position. A great crisis in my life had arrived, my future rested more or less in my own hands, and I was tortured and torn by doubts and perplexities. I knew Mr. Pierce to be a good, true, honest gentleman, if ever there was one, and that his influence in my life would change me for the better, as nothing else could. I was not sure whether I was in love with him. I fancied I was too much afraid of him for that, but I told myself that I would have married him gladly and willingly had I felt that I was morally his equal. At last I made up my mind to confide in Caroline Carey, and ask her advice, so, going down to the dining-room, I found her sitting contentedly alone in front of a cheerful little fire sipping a cup of tea.

"Ah! Here you are at last," she said as I entered the room.  
"You must be perished. I found it so cold with all this rain that

I had the fire lighted, and ordered some tea. Sit down here comfortably and have a cup."

I took the tea, and sat staring thoughtfully at the little yellow flames dancing so energetically over the coals.

"I met Mr. Pierce out, and we went for a walk," I began abruptly. Mrs. Carey lifted her eyebrows.

"Do you think you're wise to encourage him, Josephine?" she said, with some hesitation. "I can't help fancying he's fond of you, and even if you like him in return, it's too soon yet to think of anything like that."

"I was just going to ask your advice on that very subject."

"Do you mean to say he *has* proposed to you?"

I nodded my head.

"And have you accepted him?" she asked anxiously.

"Not yet. I'm to give him my answer to-morrow. Caroline, do try to put yourself in my place and tell me what to do. He really is a good man, and I'm sure would make the best of husbands, but he's *too* strait-laced; you've no idea how strict and honourable he is. I'm *afraid* to marry him!"

"Dear me," said Caroline, completely bewildered; "I can't understand what you mean. I should have thought the more upright and honourable you found a man, the more you would wish to marry him, if you had any inclination to do so to begin with."

"But I'm not at all sure that I want to be good," I said, regardless of Mrs. Carey's feelings, "and I should *have* to be if I married Mr. Pierce. Good people are always in a state of mental discomfort either on their own account or other people's. Then there's the money and the independence; it's a lot to give up! If I don't marry him I shall gain the whole world and lose my soul alive, as your husband would probably put it."

"Good gracious, Josephine, what dreadful things you're saying! Why should you be wicked if you don't marry this man? You could make your home with us, and you know John would give you all the spiritual help you needed."

"No," I said slowly, "I couldn't lead a life like that if I were free. If I refused him I should go my own way and live to enjoy myself as far as my means would allow. One woman could do a lot on my income."

"Are you sure you haven't got a touch of that horrid Indian

fever?" inquired Caroline, evidently convinced that I was wandering in my mind.

"No," I laughed. "I'm only explaining matters to you. What is your advice after all? Shall I say yes or no?"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Caroline, "do let me call John; his advice would be far better than mine."

"I don't want John's advice, and please don't tell him anything about this till it's been settled one way or the other. I want to know what *you* think I had better do?"

"Well, my dear, if you really feel that Mr. Pierce is the only person who can influence you for good, by all means marry him."

"I'm sure I should make him miserable," I said argumentatively.

"He took his chance of that when he proposed to you."

"Then you would say 'yes,' if you were me?"

"I think so, if what you say is really the case. You would certainly have to give up your income, but it's not as if he were a poor man. What I can't understand is your want of confidence in yourself without him. Surely if you pray for help and guidance ——"

Here the door was flung open, letting in a flood of light, and the parlourmaid entered carrying a lamp, the Carey children following close at her heels, so that our conversation came to an end, leaving me almost as undecided as when it began, and I had no further opportunity of speaking to Caroline alone before it was time for me to start off the next afternoon to meet Mr. Pierce.

Unlike the previous day, the weather was faultless; there was scarcely a cloud in the sky, and a warm soft wind stirred the leaves on the trees that had been washed so clean and fresh by the recent rain. The sun shone brilliantly, reminding me of India—was I to go back there or not? Strange as it may seem, even as I left the Vicarage that afternoon, I had not actually made up my mind as to what my answer was to be. All night long I had lain awake thinking the matter over; one moment I had fully determined that I would marry him, for I knew I should never repent it, and the next I was equally certain that I could never bring myself to settle down as his wife. I so longed for, vulgarly speaking, a "real good fling;" to be as extravagant as I pleased, to go where the whim seized me, to be answerable to nobody for my actions. Rich, independent, young, free and

handsome (for I knew *now* what I was like)—ah! what a time was in my very grasp! I could not give it up, and yet, to keep it, I should have to say “no” to the man who was waiting for me to come to him with “yes” on my lips. As I neared the cliff I saw him walking restlessly up and down, but as he caught sight of me he turned and came hurriedly forward to meet me. Oh! What should I say? Was it to be yes, or no?

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## MY CHOICE.

“It is too late to look back to the land,  
With moorings loosed, and keel slipped from the strand.”

IT was all over at last. My choice had been made, my fate decided, and I was back in my bedroom at the Vicarage, taking off my hat in front of the glass. I was startled at my own reflection, my face looked so white and old, and my lips like a little thin red line. My heart was heavy with regret, though of my own free will I had faced Walter Pierce half an hour before in the glowing afternoon sunshine, and distinctly told him that I preferred my wealth and independence to him. He had said very little: perhaps if he had tried to plead his cause he might even then have won it, but it was not in his nature to beg or supplicate for what he wanted, and he had accepted his fate calmly and with a brave front. I might have fancied that he scarcely felt it, only his brown eyes and tightly-pressed lips showed me more clearly than words could have done that it had gone very hardly with him. But after I had told him, after we had parted in silence, though I knew I had chosen evil instead of good and my heart ached to call him back, there was a wild excitement surging in my blood which overcame the regret.

I burned to get away, to begin my new life, and sever all old ties and associations. I should have to fight out the question of my departure with the Careys, get rid of Tom (who, luckily, was simply dancing to be off to the Bartons'), bid Aunt Addie farewell, and then for the world and the realization of my fondest dreams!

There came a knock at my door, and Caroline Carey poked her head in.

"Well?" she asked, entering the room full of curiosity, and closing the door behind her.

"I've said 'no,'" I answered abruptly; "he has gone away, and I don't suppose I shall ever see him again."

"Dear me! Is it *quite* settled? Are you sure he won't come back?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, it seems rather a pity perhaps; but, after all, of course you know your own mind best. It won't make any difference, and I'm very glad we are not going to lose you."

"We must talk about that to-night," I answered, scenting a struggle, for Caroline persistently ignored the possibility of my being in earnest on the subject of leaving them.

The tea-bell came to the rescue for the present, and all through that most detestable of meals, the meat-tea, I was conscious that I talked incessantly, and also that my conversation was composed of the most unutterable nonsense, though what it was about I could not have told if I had been asked the minute afterwards. The evening seemed interminable: the scene on the cliff haunted me mercilessly, and I was impatient for change and action, to banish it from my mind. I determined to unfold my plans to the Careys before we went to bed, so after family prayers were over I began by informing Tom that I had arranged for his leaving the following morning, since "Barton" had assured him he would be welcome at any moment, so that all we had to do was to telegraph to his friend early the next day.

"You'd better pack your things to-night," I said, wishing to get him out of the room, and he tore off without saying good-night to any of us to prepare for his long-desired journey. Then I turned to Mr. Carey.

"I want to talk to you and Caroline about my plans," I began a little nervously, for I knew I should meet with opposition, and I also felt that the Careys, having been extremely kind, might with justice consider me rather ungrateful.

Caroline looked at her husband.

"What 'plans,' Josephine?" she said. "You know we both wish you to make your home with us. Where else could you live? You don't like being at Ivy Villa."

Mr. Carey bent his long narrow head in benign acquiescence.

"You're very good and kind," I said, "and always have been.

I'm *really* grateful; but, indeed, I can't live here altogether. Though I'm young, I'm not a child, and I want to see something of the world."

"There's plenty of time for that," said Mr. Carey. "I thought we might all go abroad for a month next summer."

"I know it's very sudden," I went on, ignoring this well-meant proposal; "but I've made up my mind to go to-morrow."

"Go where?" inquired the Careys in a breath.

"To London."

Mr. Carey was perfectly aghast. "*What?*" he exclaimed. "You can't go and live in London *alone!*"

"Why not? Lots of women in my circumstances do it. I shall probably take a flat and make it my head-quarters."

"It wouldn't be right. You're much too young; it's quite out of the question!"

I gently reminded him that I was a widow and my own mistress, and that therefore nothing could prevent my going when or where I pleased, whereupon the usually silent John Carey lifted up his voice and held forth for over half-an-hour. He told me, what was no doubt very true, that I should be walking straight into the jaws of every kind of temptation connected with the world, the flesh and the devil. He asserted that the very fact of my wishing to break away from the moral security of the Vicarage proved that I was the last person to be launched alone on the dangerous seas of life. He predicted dire and awful consequences of my folly and self-will, and compared me to the prodigal son, winding up by stating that, if nothing would induce me to alter my mind, I should always find himself and Caroline willing to take me back when I had wasted my substance, and wearied of the world's empty vanities. I had no idea that Mr. Carey possessed such eloquence out of the pulpit, and impressive though he became, he in no wise altered my determination, and at the end of his exhortation I mildly remarked that I still wished to go, and thanked him for his kind promise to take me back when I wished to return.

"Of course I'll come and see you sometimes if you'll have me," I concluded. "It isn't as if I was going to the other end of the earth; it's only that I want to have a home of my own, and I'm sure when it's all settled you'll say I was right. *Please* don't be angry about it. I know I'm going very suddenly, but Caroline

will tell you what happened to-day, and after that I feel I *must* go."

Finally, after a little more argument and expostulation, we all retired to bed, Mr. Carey stern and unrelenting in his displeasure, Caroline half-crying, and I (though sincerely sorry to have so vexed the kind couple) with my heart beating high at the prospect of the coming change.

I released Tom the following morning from his much-hated bondage at the Vicarage, giving him a "tip," which caused him to redden with pleasure to the roots of his coarse stubby hair, and saw him off to finish his holidays at "Barton's governor's place," the happiest boy in England.

Then I packed and labelled my boxes, and made all arrangements for leaving in a few hours; and this done, I repaired to Ivy Villa to bid Aunt Addie adieu. The stuffy little drawing-room brought the past back to me with hideous distinctness, and I rejoiced to think that I was free, and dependent on nobody but myself for happiness. Still, all the same, whenever I thought of Walter Pierce, and every time his strong manly face rose up in my mind, I felt as if a needle had been run into my heart, and tears were perilously near my eyes. I had and still loved him almost as well as myself—but not *quite*.

Aunt Addie was not the least interested in my sudden departure, and barely inquired where I was going. All she dwelt upon was my assurance that I had provided for Tom, and that in no case should he be returned to her charge; and once her mind had been set at rest on this point, she would talk of nothing but some new pills she had been recommended as a remedy for a disease she had never heard of before, but which she was now convinced she was suffering from acutely.

"Good-bye, Aunt Addie," I said at last; "I may not see you again for some time, as I shall probably go abroad for the winter. Good-bye, and please remember that I shall always bear in mind who it was took care of me when father and mother died and I was left alone in the world."

"I shan't be able to remember anything for very much longer," moaned Aunt Addie dismally. "I feel positive my time on earth is drawing to a close. Good-bye, Josephine, my dear; always be careful not to catch cold. I can only hope that you will never live to be such an invalid as your poor aunt."

I left her weeping over her misfortunes, and then there was one little thing I wanted to do before leaving the old life behind me. I meant to say good-bye to the place where I had last seen Walter Pierce ; so I walked quickly to the cliff, for I had hardly any time to spare, and stood for a minute on the very spot where I had made my choice of the two paths of life open to me. I looked vacantly out over the glittering sea as I compared them in my mind—the one so quiet, smooth and safe, protected by the strong love of a good man ; the other, perhaps stormy and dangerous, beset with snares and temptations, but sparkling and seductive, full of attractions and excitement—full of *life*. The latter was the path I had chosen. Where would it lead me in the end ?

THE END.

## The Friendly Fog.

By BLANCHE YORKE.

### CHAPTER I.

NANCE ELRIN sank into the spacious arm-chair in her bedroom and heaved a deep sigh. Life was difficult ; and she drew down her brows quickly over her violet eyes. Why *would* young men insist on being lovers instead of friends ! She was enjoying a visit to her friend Mrs. Doraine, in her shooting box away in Derbyshire, and it did seem too bad that her brother's friend, Bertie Kendrick, should insist on playing the devout lover every day. Ah, well ! to-night, at any rate, a new element was coming into the house. Mr. North, a barrister of no mean reputation, was expected.

When Nance thought of "home" her face darkened. There she had always been taught that the sooner she fulfilled her mission in life and met with a good *parti* the better. She had no place there. Certainly any difficulties would be smoothed over if she were to marry Bertie, and he was kind and generous, and she thought, no, she knew, he loved her.

Ah ! the first bell : she must dress, and that quickly.

A striking personality makes itself felt wherever it goes, and affects the very atmosphere around it. Miss Elrin confessed to herself at dinner that evening as she talked to the new arrival, that here at any rate was a man of strong character, and one too whom one might trust, she felt instinctively.

\*       \*       \*       \*

In the mornings at Rock Edge, every one went their own way as a rule, and one day Nance, in a short serge walking costume, and armed with a stick, made her escape soon after breakfast and went away over the moors for a solitary ramble.

The crisp autumn air brought colour into her cheeks as she walked with a firm step over the white roads. It was a joy to be

alive, and a pleasure to be alone with her thoughts and fancies. She went for a long way, but at length her energy began to wane and she sat on an invitingly low wall and listened to the far-away sounds of life in the region of the neighbouring cottages. "Tired, Miss Elrin?" said a voice at her back. She started to find Mr. North beside her; he had come across the field behind. Rex North was not actually a handsome man but his strong features and keen blue eyes had a charm that is beyond mere good looks; his suit of rough tweed became him too. His eyes were wonderfully fascinating; at once piercing and kind.

"I must apologize for startling you."

"Pray don't," she said with a smile; "it is only that the ground is so soft one does not hear footsteps."

"And one's thoughts are so all-engrossing," he added with a twinkle. He vaulted lightly over the wall and sat beside her.

"Ye-es," she answered, digging the end of her stick into the earth and reddening slightly. She had been considering Mr. Kendrick and many things, and somehow she had the unreasonable consciousness that her companion could read her thoughts with those strangely penetrating eyes of his. "I enjoy a walk alone now and then, don't you?" she said, meeting his glance.

"Yes, indeed. Perhaps you would rather I went on—I am rested. I think I will go," he said solemnly, and stood up.

"No, please do not," she answered, laughing. "I am very rude. As a matter of fact, I have had enough of my own thoughts, and would willingly hear some-one else's, yours, say."

He sat down again, having indeed had no intention of going, and they were soon chatting quite confidentially. At many a turn in the conversation she felt a kind of glad surprise, a feeling that in her companion there was ever a beyond which it would be interesting to explore; she herself, too, unconsciously showed at her deepest, truest and most thoughtful, under the influence of his strong, sympathetic personality.

"Then do you think every woman should work, in some way?" she asked, in answer to one of his remarks.

"Most women would be the better for having work, I think," he said. "For some, simply 'to be' is enough; they *are*, and have fulfilled their destiny."

"The pretty woman, who amuses, I suppose you mean."

"Not quite that ; your sex rarely manages to combine both those charms, I find. When a woman does, she is irresistible. But I do think the ordinary woman would be the better for a settled occupation or pursuit to occupy her time."

"Do you know," said his hearer, with almost childish frankness, "it would be a great relief to me to take up something. I do get so sick of my life, so weary of the round of dinners and entertainments, and I have nothing to do at home. What do you think I could do ?" and she bent forward and regarded him with eager eyes.

He shook his head. "That is for you to find out ; I am afraid I don't know you well enough yet (with gentle emphasis) to give you any advice that would be of any use. Try to find your own bent. But one thing *do not* do for any sake !"

"What is that ?"

He drew a shade nearer and looked into her soft deep eyes with an expression in his own, half-laughing, half-serious. "Don't trample your intellect in the dust and marry some in-every-way desirable man that can't understand you."

She drew herself up slightly.

"You are not offended ?" he asked, in his rich low voice. "I'm afraid it sounded rather a boorish thing to say, but it does seem to me so horribly sad that women should disgrace their womanhood as they do, so often, the best of them, for a mess of pottage and a carriage and pair !"

"No oftener than you men disgrace your manhood," she retorted.

"Two blacks do not make a white" said he with a smile.

"Certainly not," she replied ; "but I wish you to acknowledge that your sex is a 'black' as well as mine. How some of you with *your* brains can marry the *dolls* you do, passes my comprehension !"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly and proceeded to stand up for his sex. So the time passed, until Nance suddenly realized that it might be as well to turn her steps homeward, and think of such a mundane thing as lunch.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. DORAIN never allowed the time to hang heavily on her visitors' hands. She was always arranging some fresh amusement for them, and now *tableaux* were the order of the day—*tableaux* to which all the county was invited, and which were to be followed by a dance.

The affair took a good deal of planning, but at length everything was arranged and the date fixed. Nance Elrin had vowed she would be Florence Nightingale and wear a cheap costume that entailed no trouble, but in the end she was induced to play "Lady Betty;" the idea of dancing a gavotte, on being wound up, was too alluring. The rôle of Sir Harry Bellairs was appropriated by North.

The friendship between these two had made rapid strides in one short week, a week, however, in which each spent a great part of every day in the other's company.

It was the evening before the *tableaux*, and the household was considerably scattered.

"Lady Betty," said Sir Harry, "might I ask for a final rehearsal?"

"By all means," she said, smiling. "Is the coast clear in the hall?"

They found the dim square hall was empty. Her amber gown made a bright spot of colour on the polished floor.

"One, two"—and they went through the quaint, sweet dance almost silently, only, when their hands touched and their eyes met, she smiled. He thought he had never in all his life seen a lovelier face or a more graceful form.

"You will give me more than this one gavotte?" he pleaded, and his eyes looked down into hers.

"Yes, if you wish it."

"I do. I am not greedy, but will you give me three *valses*?"

She raised her eyebrows.

He gave the hand he held the faintest pressure. "I am going away very soon," he said softly.

"Are you? Ah, yes! So are we all," and she promised him what he asked.

Then he led her to the great arm-chair by the fireplace, for they had finished their dance.

"When do you go?" she asked, in an ordinary voice, but the idea of his going struck a chill to her heart.

"Not till Thursday."

She laughed softly. "Why did you alarm me without cause?" half-mockingly.

"Alarm is a strong word. I wish it were not too strong a one," he whispered.

"How do you know that it is?" she said gaily.

He bent his bright eyes upon her, and something in the expression of them quenched the laughter in her own. She tapped the floor nervously with her little amber shoe. Then suddenly a thought seemed to strike him and a stern look came into his face, but still he did not take his eyes off her.

"There is a question I wanted to ask you."

"Yes?" she said, startled at the change in his voice.

"Some one told me you were engaged. Is there any truth in the report, may I ask?"

She sat bolt upright, and a quick blush of anger came into her face.

"And who is your informant?"

"I would rather not tell you," shortly.

"Then may I ask the name of my *fiancé*?" still more coldly.

"Certainly. Kendrick was reported to be the happy man."

"Mr. Kendrick—" she began.

"Yes; did you call?" answered Bertie himself, coming down the staircase at that moment with an armful of miscellaneous garments. "Perhaps you could help me," he continued cheerfully, hiding well his annoyance at finding the two *tête-à-tête*. "Can a fellow wear old gold hose with a red satin coat?"

"Well, the effect would be gay, to say the least of it," said North drily. "What are you? Ah, yes—Romeo. Juliet arrives to-morrow—Miss Hawthorne," he added, as if the idea were rather a pleasant one.

"I have never met Miss Hawthorne," said Nance, more for the sake of making conversation than for anything else.

"No?" said Rex with slight animation. "You will like her. Every one does. She is charmingly pretty."

"No doubt I shall think her delightful, then," she said politely,

and made her way back to the drawing-room, feeling unreasonably put out.

From beginning to end the *tableaux* were a great success. The audience were electrified when music struck up in the distance and the two figures danced their gavotte with a grave, sweet grace. To them, though, it was not as it had been the evening before. It was as if a breath of the chill outer air had blown over them. And each was proud. She gave him the dances, later, that she had promised, and talked to him brightly and seemed her gayest self. He met her remarks with courtesy and often with a cold sarcasm that chilled her.

Early in the evening she had spent a decidedly *mauvais quart d'heure* in the library with Kendrick. He told her he loved her, and asked her to marry him. A week ago she might have said "yes;" but now another face came between them. She did not confess to herself that she loved this other; but friendship with him made life deeper and more interesting, and somehow made the idea of anything but a perfect marriage hateful to her.

It was unfortunate that Rex North and Miss Hawthorne should have happened to pass the door of the library just when poor Bertie was pleading his very best and in his most lover-like attitude.

North's face darkened as he saw the touching picture on the sofa.

"Flirt!" he muttered, too low for his companion to hear.

She raised her forget-me-not eyes to his with a light laugh. "Evidently we are *de trop*."

They walked away.

"I am afraid Miss Elrin is a sad flirt; but I believe it really is a case this time," she said, with a spice of malice in her tone.

Rex was puzzled and angry, too. Had she not told him with her own lips that the report he had heard was false? Either she was untruthful, or a most atrocious flirt. He was ashamed of himself for having had a doubt of her truthfulness. She was a flirt, then—that was almost as bad as being a liar. He had done with her. He never wished to see her false face again.

## CHAPTER III.

TOWARDS the evening of the next day, Nance Elrin found herself on the platform at King's Cross. No one had come to meet her, but that was a trifle. She was not accustomed to receiving delicate attentions from her home people. She soon secured a hansom, and in ten minutes was deposited at the door of the gloomy house in Russell Square that was her "home, sweet home."

"There's no place like home!" she thought sometimes—no place quite *like* it, *quite* so cheerless and depressing!

She walked straight into the dining-room. Mr. and Mrs. Elrin were at dinner. He was a bald, ill-tempered looking man, a victim to the gout, which, as often happens, had settled in his *temper*.

His (second) wife, who sat opposite him, was a lady of a sallow and wrinkled countenance. She still retained her youthful figure, and delighted in pretty tea-gowns. Their reception of their daughter was characteristic.

"Shut the door, can't you?" growled Elrin *père*. "Do they think it's July?"

His daughter saw to the shutting of the offending door, and then returned to give her parents a dutiful peck on each cheek.

"Your train must be late," remarked Mrs. Elrin in her high voice. "We waited dinner for you till everything was nearly spoiled."

"Really? I am sorry," said Nance pleasantly. "I will run upstairs and take my things off as quickly as possible."

Dinner was as cheering a meal as ever. No one cared to hear whether the poor girl had enjoyed her visit to the north or not. The lady only took an interest in two subjects, dress and servants, and the gentleman's mental range did not extend much further.

But Nance had learnt to live alone long ago. Mrs. Browning's words, in "Aurora Leigh," described her state:

"I kept the life thrust on me, on the outside  
Of the inner life with all its ample room  
For heart and lungs, for will and intellect."

She lived her own life bravely and refused to be depressed by her surroundings. She was no mean artist, and an omnivorous reader, so that she was not dull; but a woman with a heart and a thoughtful, imaginative nature must express herself, *must* have sympathy. She began to write informal essays on the books she read, or to follow up trains of thought suggested by them, and so she found relief in expression.

Then suddenly the idea came to her of sending something to a paper, just to test its worth. She met with success at the outset.

The editor of *Variety* gave her every encouragement, and she became a regular contributor. Then she knew the delight and relief of congenial work. She felt so independent of her own private life. She knew that if she were never again to enjoy personal happiness, there would be still much left to live for. So the winter wore on and February came with its pea-soup fogs.

Nance had spent an afternoon in shopping in spite of the fog; it seemed hopeless to be kept indoors by it any longer. Towards five o'clock, however, it became thicker and yellower every minute. She felt half choked. The gas lamps glimmered faintly and there was an air of excommunication over the land. She did not know where she was, and decided to cross over in search of a landmark. She made a dash. There was the sound of hard breathing near, and something ran up against her. She was pulled sharply back on to the curbstone. She had had a narrow escape of being run over.

She turned to thank her rescuer. Even in the darkness the outline of his figure seemed familiar. He, too, looked hard at her.

Both advanced to the shop window.

He recognized her with a rush of glad surprise.

"You, Miss Elrin!" said Rex North's rich voice with a ring of genuine pleasure in it.

"Thank you for pulling me back in time," she said, as she remembered that but for him she might at that moment have been lying in the mud.

"How rash of you to venture out on such a day!"

"And equally rash of you," she laughed.

"I believe this is a restaurant of some sort," he said with

sudden inspiration. "Won't you come in and have a cup of tea before you venture any farther?"

The prospect of tea was irresistible.

They found the place almost empty and took possession of a table at the far end.

Both felt strangely light-hearted in spite of the fog. She looked lovelier than ever, he thought, in her neat costume of dark blue. She took off her gloves deliberately. As she did so, his eyes were fixed anxiously on her left hand. He sipped his tea serenely when he had seen that she wore no obnoxious diamond hoop on the third finger.

"By the way," she exclaimed suddenly, leaning forward slightly and smiling, "I have an interesting piece of news for you. Guess who is engaged! Some one who was at Rock Edge."

His blue eyes looked down into hers with no answering smile in them, but only anxiety.

"I give it up."

"Bertie Kendrick," she said, and waited for the effect of her words.

"And is the girl also of the Rock Edge party?"

He had gone rather white.

"No, certainly not," she answered quickly, and then blushed furiously as she saw his meaning; "you are *quite* mistaken," she murmured.

"Poor Kendrick!" he said, in a tone of deep commiseration.

"Why poor? Indeed, he does not need any one's pity, I assure you."

She raised her eyes and was astonished at the change a few seconds had wrought in his face. It wore an expression at once tender and amused and a smile illumined it like a flash of sunlight.

"But I *do* pity him," he persisted, leaning forward so as to get a better look at her, his eyes dancing. "You see, unfortunately I happened—er—to arrive at the door of the library one night when you and he seemed to be having rather an interesting *tête-à-tête*."

Silence. Then somehow both laughed.

"I came to a wrong conclusion that night, thank God," he said earnestly.

Something—some sudden shy impulse made her rise and say she must go. She dared not raise her eyes, but she was happy.

"You had better have a hansom," he remarked, "then there will be no more chance of your being run over." He hailed one. She held out her hand to North.

"I would rather see you safely home, if you don't mind," he said, and before waiting for her answer he sprang in and shut the door.

They drove in silence for a few minutes. Then :

"Nance," he said, in a voice which shook with the love and tenderness beneath it, "it is no good running away from me, because you see you can't get away from me. I love you. Dare I hope you can care for me?"

She could not speak, only she held out her hand to him in the darkness. He drew her into the shelter of his arms and their lips met.

"Sweetheart!" he whispered.

For a long time she did not speak. At last the passion in her found utterance and all reserve was swept away.

"Oh, Rex, Rex, do you love me? Say it again!" she cried.

And he said it.

"By the way," he said later, "you were speaking of the paper *Variety*. I know the editor."

"Really!" she said, roused to interest in something beside themselves at last. She tried to read his face, but the weather was against her.

"And is he interesting? He must be. I have had such kind, clever letters from him—indeed, we had quite a long correspondence on a variety of subjects."

Her companion grunted.

"Are you laughing?" she inquired suddenly.

"Oh, no, Heaven forbid!" said he, in a preternaturally solemn voice. "But—would you care for an introduction to your editor?"

"Yes, indeed. When will you introduce me?" she asked eagerly.

"Now, this minute," said Rex. "Darling, forgive me if you can," and he drew her to him. "I have deceived you abominably. The man's name is North—Rex North! I can't tell you

what it has been to me to keep you in sight all these months and know your thoughts on things, but I have been a brute to deceive you."

A short pause and she burst into a ringing laugh.

"Oh, you villain, how could you? How cruelly you have 'had' me!" And then the colour rushed into her cheeks and she burst out: "Now I understand it! I searched and searched and often could never find my papers. *You never published the half* of them. It was mean—mean. I shall never get over the humiliation of it," she moaned.

"Oh, yes, you will—try," he said gently.

And she tried.

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## "The House that Jack Built."

By DARLEY DALE,

Author of "FAIR KATHERINE," "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," etc.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### ANOTHER MAIDEN ALL FORLORN.

THAT other was Miss Lydia.

The hope that had revived on the evening of Felix's last visit, only to be quenched as soon as the visit was over, had refused to be rekindled in her virgin breast, until, one day soon after the news of poor Amy's death reached the cottage, it again showed signs of life.

Miss Lydia had for days been pondering over Felix's conduct, and wondering why it was he had gone so far and then stopped short, when she overheard Miss Sophia remark to a friend :

"He is a very strict Catholic—far more strict, even, than his father."

That was it, of course. How stupid of her never to have thought of it before ! The hitch was the difference of creed. No doubt Felix was bound down by no end of laws never to marry any one who did not belong to his Church. No doubt he considered her a Protestant : he little knew how very little difference there was between them.

So thought Miss Lydia, little knowing how very great is the difference.

The next step Miss Lydia took was to wonder, since the difference was so slight, why should there be any difference at all—why, in short, should she not become a Catholic ? Every barrier would then be removed ; and since she was now convinced this was the reason Felix had not proposed to her, she made up her mind she would do so.

This resolution necessitated a great many visits to the vestry, a great many interviews with the rector—all of which Miss Lydia

thoroughly enjoyed ; also a great deal of controversial reading, which she did not enjoy at all. However, it had to be done ; the rector positively refused to let her go until she had waded through several big volumes he lent her.

Miss Lydia was very naughty at this time. She frequently went to mass, and did not always mention it when she went to confession to the rector, which she still continued to do ; but she was thoroughly enjoying herself, and in no great hurry to sever her relations with her Protestant director. That would be a great wrench, she told herself. There was no need for any great hurry, either. Felix was coming over again at Easter to stay with Mr. Lockwood. She would wait till then, and take the step she hoped would lead to her speedy marriage while he was in Jersey.

Miss Keppel was unaware of what was going on. She had been so shocked by Amy's death that she had taken very little notice of Miss Lydia's vagaries ; and then, when Mr. Lockwood returned, she was very much occupied with him and little Gladys, whom she visited every day.

It was therefore somewhat of a surprise to her when one day in Easter week Miss Lydia said to her :

" Sophy, I hope it will not make any difference to you, but I am going to be received into the Catholic Church next Monday."

" What do you mean, Lydia ? For the last fifteen years you have been dinnin' it into my ears that you are a Catholic. What *do* you mean ? "

" I thought I was. But I know better now. I mean I am going over to Rome," faltered Miss Lydia.

" Oh ! now I understand. Well, all I have to say is, if you do go, stay there ; don't play with fire. Don't coquette with Rome, Lydia, as you used to coquette with men."

" I am never going to coquette with any one any more," said Miss Lydia.

" I should hope not ; at your age it is time to give up such vanities, even supposing you could find some one to coquette with you, which I doubt."

" I have sown my wild oats. I am going to settle down," said Miss Lydia.

" I am glad to hear it; you have been a long time about it," returned Miss Sophia.

" Yes, but girls will be girls, Sophy."

"Girls! You ceased to be a girl a good many years ago, Lydia."

"At any rate I shall soon be one no longer," said Miss Lydia with meaning, but Miss Keppel paid but little attention to the remark, and certainly had no idea to what her sister alluded.

The following Sunday Miss Lydia put off her mourning for Amy and went to mass, where, to her delight, she despaired Felix Oxburgh a few seats in front of her. Her heart beat very fast at the sight of him, but he was too much occupied with his own devotions to notice her presence; indeed, he would scarcely have recognized her as they came out of church had she not first greeted him.

She was radiant with smiles, her little faded face framed in a new bonnet with some pink in it, though not perhaps the traditional pink feather, that last resource of feminine vanity. She tripped down Bath Street by his side, for Felix had the courtesy to offer to see her to the station, though he little knew how she misinterpreted this act of politeness.

"When he hears the good news I have to tell him, he will get into the train with me," thought Miss Lydia, as she cast about in her mind for the best way of announcing the change she contemplated making in her religion.

Unconsciously Felix helped her.

"Do you often come to mass?" he asked, looking down at his little companion.

He was such a giant by the side of Miss Lydia, who was a little fairy-like creature, that he looked bigger than ever by her side.

"Yes, lately I have often been, and I shall come more often still after to-morrow," she answered mysteriously, not wishing to fill Felix's cup of joy too quickly, lest it should run over.

"Why after to-morrow?" asked Felix.

"Because to-morrow I am going to be received into the Church," said Miss Lydia.

"Are you, indeed, my dear Miss Lydia? I am delighted. That is the best piece of news I have heard for a long time. I congratulate you most sincerely," said Felix enthusiastically.

"I was right, but I was sure of it. That was the obstacle. Oh! dear, how frightened I feel. I wonder how he will propose. I wish we were at the station; I am so nervous. No, I don't; not

just yet. What shall I next say?" thought Miss Lydia as Felix, all unconscious of the hopes he was exciting, continued to congratulate her.

"There is a waiting-room at the station; we might seal our engagement there," thought Miss Lydia.

"Thank you; I—I knew you would be glad," she answered, blushingly.

"I am indeed. And now that you have been so good as to confide in me, I will tell you something about myself," began Felix.

"It is coming at last. Oh! my poor fluttering heart. I shall not say 'yes' at first; I must keep him in suspense a little while, the naughty man, to punish him for all he has made me suffer," thought Miss Lydia.

"What I am going to tell you will, I daresay, surprise you," said Felix.

"Not so very much, I think," simpered Miss Lydia.

"Have you already heard it, then?" he asked, in surprise that the news had already reached Jersey, for he had not wished it spoken of.

"No, but I have seen it coming," said Miss Lydia, glancing up at her handsome escort.

"How very odd," thought Felix. "I should not have given her credit for so much observation." "I only decided, though it had been the wish of my life for some time previously, but I only decided at poor Amy's death," said Felix.

"Then there was something between them. I always suspected there was. Ah, well, men will be foolish sometimes. I have been so myself more than once. I must not be hard upon him," thought Miss Lydia.

"I fancied she had something to do with it," she answered aloud.

"How on earth came she to fancy that?" thought Felix.

"You see I had to think of my father also; but he was very good, and consented, though it is rather a blow to him to see Oxburgh pass out of our immediate family, as it must do if I leave no heir," continued Felix.

"Dear me, where shall I look? How very odd of him to speak so very plainly, and to take my acceptance for granted. I may not accept him after all. I must check him, I really

must. The conversation is becoming so very peculiar," thought Miss Lydia.

"I don't quite understand," she said primly.

"Why, you know Oxburgh can never go to a Protestant, so if I leave no heir, it must go to a distant relation, as my sisters are both Protestants. You know our priests are celibate, we cannot marry," explained Felix.

What did he mean? Was he in his right mind? "We priests" —to what was he alluding?

"I am afraid I don't understand," said Miss Lydia, her faded cheeks growing paler and her hopes sinking lower than ever.

"I beg your pardon, I thought you understood to what I was alluding. I am going to be a priest. I have already taken some of the minor orders."

"Oh!" said Miss Lydia in a very long drawn out tone, and it was all she could find to say; but luckily for her they were at the station, and only just in time to catch her train.

In the bustle of departure her confusion was covered, and Felix never knew the hopes he had raised and dashed to the ground in that interview. As the train moved out of the station Miss Lydia threw herself back in her corner of the carriage, fortunately for her an empty one, and gasped out, "Too late," as she glanced tenderly at her little gloved hand, which Felix, in his enthusiasm at her conversion, had decidedly squeezed.

"If I had only been a Catholic when he was last here, we should have been engaged; now I have driven him to eternal celibacy. Oh! foolish, foolish Lydia, what atonement can I make?"

Before she could solve this problem the train reached Saumarez, and she had to walk home, where the first thing she did was to go into hysterics, which Miss Keppel ascribed to the ceremony to be undergone the next day, as to which that good lady had very vague ideas; but she thought it probable a sheet and a candle would be involved in it.

Miss Lydia was too prostrate to come downstairs again that day; she was understood to be preparing for the ordeal to be undergone the following morning, and as Miss Keppel had heard confession formed part of the function she was not surprised.

The next morning Miss Lydia appeared dressed in black, with

a very grave air, looking, her sister mentally observed, as if she were going to a funeral.

"What time does this ceremony take place?" she inquired.

"I have promised to be at the church at eleven," answered Miss Lydia.

"Is there anything to see? Can I come and look on?"

"Certainly not, Sophy; I shall be in the confessional most of the time."

"But, after that, surely there will be some kind of ceremony: there will be dressing up and lighting of candles; I am sure Catholics can do nothing without a candle."

"I don't know what the ceremony is; I do know I would rather you did not come; in fact I don't think you'll be admitted."

"Oh, well, I daresay I shall survive. I only hope when you come back you will look a little happier than you do now," replied Miss Keppel, to which remark Miss Lydia only answered with a sigh.

When the sisters met again at luncheon, Miss Lydia was still preternaturally grave, and still dressed in black.

"Well, Lydia, is it over? Are you a full-blown Papist now?" said Miss Keppel, who was more annoyed at this last freak of her sister's than she cared to show.

"No, it is not over; I am not yet a Papist as you call it," answered Miss Lydia.

"Oh! there is some hitch, is there?"

"I should prefer not to discuss it," replied Miss Lydia.

"Very well. May I ask where you have been all the morning?"

"With the rector."

"Why, I thought you had quarrelled with him."

"Mr. Jimpson is too saintly to quarrel with any one. I had grieved him very much, but there was no quarrel."

"I am glad to hear it. Is Rome given up, then?"

"Nothing is decided, Sophy. Nothing will be decided for a month. I have promised to wait a month; until then I do not wish to speak to any one but Mr. Jimpson on the subject. In fact I have promised him I will not."

"Umph! Well, you know your own affairs best; but I think if I had gone as far as you have done, I should have gone still further."

Miss Lydia did not answer, and no more was said on the sub-

ject ; but during the next month there was a great change observable in Miss Lydia. All the ribbons and coquettish aprons in which she had formerly delighted were put rigidly away, and she dressed in the plainest style possible, and not a scrap of colour was admitted.

She went regularly to what Miss Dorcas used to call "prayers," and she called "matins" and "evensong," every morning and evening, and five times a day she disappeared mysteriously into her own room.

Lives of the Saints and theological works took the place of the novels and poems in which she had formerly delighted ; and though she continued to play bezique in the evening, it was evidently done in a spirit of penance rather than of pleasure.

At the end of the month she announced to Miss Keppel she intended to remain in the Church of England ; but Miss Keppel was sure from her manner there was something in the background, and she wrote to Mrs. Dobson that she did not know what was in the wind, but she was quite sure Lydia intended to spring some new mine upon her some day.

Miss Lydia's next eccentricity was to spend her mornings, with the exception of those intervals for retirement before alluded to, in cutting all the embroidery and lace off her underlinen, a proceeding which completely baffled Miss Keppel, for fine linen had hitherto been one of Miss Lydia's little extravagances.

At last, about two months after Easter, Miss Lydia came in with flushed cheeks from a prolonged interview with the rector in the vestry, and completely staggered Miss Keppel with the following announcement :

" Sophy, dear, I have something to tell you. I am going to be a nun."

" A what ?" exclaimed Miss Keppel, starting as if she had been shot, and looking with her keen dark eyes at the prim little figure by her side.

" A nun, Sophy. My vocation is decided."

" Listen to me, Lydia, please. Let us clearly understand each other, for I am getting tired of all this nonsense. First of all, tell me, what you are ? Are you a Catholic or a Protestant ?"

" Oh, a Catholic, Sophy, dear ; I never was anything else ; not a Romanist, but a Catholic," said Miss Lydia fervently.

" In plain English, a Protestant. Very well ; now there are no

such things as nuns in the Church of England ; there are sisters of mercy, I believe ; disappointed women most of them, but very good women too in their way, I daresay. Am I to understand you mean to become a sister of mercy ? ”

“ Yes, I mean to leave the world and its vanities and become a religious. I shall be wedded to the Church.”

“ A religious humbug ! In the first place you are too old, in the next you are too delicate, and lastly you will be tired of it in a month. Does Mr. Jimpson approve of this freak ? ”

“ Yes, he is sure it is my vocation.”

“ More fool he. Well, you can please yourself ; you are no longer young ; you ought to know your own mind at forty——”

“ Thank you, Sophy, dear,” interrupted Miss Lydia, before the fatal age was pronounced.

“ I don’t believe you will find any sisterhood to take a woman of your age,” said Miss Keppel.

“ Oh, yes, I shall ; Mr. Jimpson has arranged all that. You see, Sophy, my income will be a great help to any convent, and age is no consideration.”

“ Apparently, the fact that I shall have to turn out of this house and move into a smaller one to end my days in alone, is no consideration either. I have been a good sister to you, Lydia, and the least you could have done is to comfort my declining years. I am getting old now, though I am still active. In a few years I may be dependent on others ; and your duty, as I conceive it, lies here,” said Miss Keppel with more feeling than she often displayed.

“ The religious life is so much higher, Sophy.”

“ Don’t talk to me of religion ; there is no religion in it. More sins are committed under the name of religion than youth itself will have to answer for. But we won’t quarrel about it, Lydia. When do you go ? ” said Miss Keppel, wisely thinking any opposition would only strengthen Miss Lydia in her resolution.

“ Next week. I go as a postulant for three months first, and then if I am elected I shall take the white veil.”

“ Oh, well, until that three months is over I shall not give notice to leave this house. You may be back here before then,” said Miss Keppel grimly.

“ I think not, Sophy. I hope not. I am so very, very happy,” said Miss Lydia devoutly.

"Ah, you have not tried it yet. I will wait till you have been there a month, and then hear what you have to say. By the way, I don't know if you will take any interest in so mundane a matter, but I have just heard Major Graham's engagement with Miss Oxburgh is broken off."

Miss Keppel took a malicious pleasure in this announcement, for when the regiment first came to Jersey, Major Graham had been rather attentive to Miss Lydia, who in return had fancied herself in love with him, and for a short time had spent her money on Noah's arks, tops and dolls for his children.

Miss Lydia started visibly at the news, and blushed to her temples.

"They say he looks miserable, but I daresay he will find some one to console him. The heart is soonest caught in the rebound," continued Miss Keppel.

"I hope he may," said Miss Lydia.

And somehow the religious life she was about to embrace did not seem so attractive as it had done a few minutes previously.

She longed to hear the details of Major Graham's affair, but pride forbade her to ask. She wondered who broke it off? Did he? If so, why? Was his heart reverting to her? If so, would it make any difference in her plans? But before she had decided this knotty point, Miss Keppel, who was apparently reading her thoughts, remarked :

"She broke it off. They say she never cared for him, and only accepted him out of pity."

Miss Lydia sighed a sigh of relief, and reflecting that no doubt it was all for the best she went up to her own room.

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

"I shall never be friends with roses again;  
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long."

AMY'S death created a nine days' wonder in Jersey, which subsided long before Jack Lockwood returned there after his leave was over, but during that nine days every kind of report was going about: murder, suicide, insanity, an accident, were all suggested; every one had a different version of the story, till all agreed it was a mystery which would never be solved.

Great curiosity was manifested in the island as to how the

widower would comfort himself. Would he be very much cut up? Would he marry again? If so, whom? Would he go out, or would he abstain from all gaieties?

This last question was soon answered, for Mr. Lockwood went nowhere, and shut himself up with his little girl most rigorously. When seen he looked a wreck; pale, thin, careworn and miserable; and his brother officers confessed he had become morose, and was so reserved that he repelled all expression of sympathy.

On Major Graham's return from Oxburgh after Easter, he relaxed somewhat to him, and their old intimacy, which for some time had ceased, appeared to be renewed. They visited each other constantly, and little Gladys went out daily with the little Grahams, and the two widowers took counsel together on the management of their children.

One day, rather more than six months after Jack returned to Jersey, the regiment was ordered to Egypt. A fortnight's notice was given them, and then the troop-ship would arrive to carry them away from the island, in which most of the officers and men had spent so many happy days.

Strange to say, Jack was not half so keen about going to Egypt as he had been about going to India in his wife's lifetime. There was Gladys; he could not take her with him. What was to be done with her? Was Graham going, or would he resign and remain in Jersey with his children, as he had talked of doing before? If the latter, there would be no difficulty about Gladys. She could go to him with Rose and he would feel sure she was well looked after.

But Mr. Lockwood soon found his friend intended to go to Egypt. He was restless and unsettled, and the order was most welcome to him. Moreover, he had a plan in view for providing for his two little girls. He intended to ask Miss Keppel to take charge of them, and, as she was now all alone, he believed he would have no difficulty in persuading her to take charge of the children.

This was an excellent arrangement, but it did not help Jack in providing for Gladys, and he was debating whether or not to take her with him, when a letter arrived from the squire, begging him to bring her to Oxburgh and leave her with them.

This was really what Jack in his heart of hearts desired, for Gladys was devoted to Joy, and he was sure the child would be

happier there than anywhere else ; the only drawback was, he did not wish to go to Oxburgh—at least so he told himself and Major Graham.

"Can't you send the child with Rose, then ?" said Major Graham, who concluded Jack was averse to going to the scene of his wife's death.

"Hardly. Mr. Oxburgh would think it very odd ; besides, I should like to see the last of Gladys, and I wish to see my boy again."

He did not add there was another person he hungered to see far more than his boy, a person he told himself he wished to avoid, a person whom he felt he wronged his late wife in thinking of, a person whom if he must see it behoved him to be as cold as ice to, a person who was seldom out of his thoughts, a person whom he loved to distraction and for that very reason must avoid, out of respect to the memory of that wife who had loved him so unwisely.

He told himself he hated Oxburgh, and dreaded going there, and yet, as he started, his heart felt gay as a schoolboy's who is returning for the holidays. He told himself he dreaded meeting Joy, and yet he counted the hours as he drew near to England, till his hungry eyes should feast once more on that sweet young face.

He told himself he must be cold as a stone to her ; that she was nothing to him, that she could never be more than his cousin by marriage ; and yet he knew she was all the world to him, that it would be torture to him to be cold to her, that all the while he would be longing to seize her and tell her how he loved her ; that he craved to hear her say she loved him, as he knew she did.

He had never doubted her love, and when he heard from Graham Joy was changed and sad, and had asked to be released from her engagement, he knew it was for his sake she had done so. And he was rejoiced that she was free, for, though he could never marry her himself, he could not bear the thought of her marrying any other man. He wished her to remain single for his sake ; he would like to think she was sighing out her life in vain for him as he for her.

It was sublimely selfish, but it was sweet, and it was man-like.

How would he find Joy looking this time ? He pictured her as he had left her, and as Major Graham had described her—pale,

sad, shy, sympathetic, longing yet not daring to express her sympathy.

Poor Joy! How sad it was that she must suffer for the sins of others. She had suffered in Amy's life-time through her treachery ; she must suffer now Amy was dead for his sins against his wife, which led to her end.

It was hard on Joy.

She felt his coldness ; he knew that. She would feel it still more now, for probably she ascribed it partly to the fact she was engaged to Major Graham when he last saw her, partly to the shock of Amy's death ; but now she would put it down to his having ceased to love her..

Should he leave her under that delusion, or should he tell her he loved her more than ever, but could never marry?

Should they vow to live unmarried for each other's sake?

Would that make her happier ?

He could not decide till he saw her ; he must be guided by her manner and by circumstances, of course not by his own feelings and inclinations.

On arriving at Oxburgh a surprise, and not a pleasant one, awaited him.

Joy was away from home.

She had gone to stay with some friends and was not expected back for ten days.

Mr. Lockwood was furious.

What did she mean by going away from home when he was expected ?

Why did she give him to understand she would take care of Gladys and then go away before the child arrived ?

Did she suppose he should leave the child there without seeing how she settled ?

Was there ever such an ill-timed visit ?

Where was she staying ?

What was she doing ?

What did she mean by such conduct ?

Thus he inwardly raged and fumed all that night ; he was as sulky and cross as could be all the evening, to the squire's great amusement, for he shrewdly guessed the reason.

The next morning Jack announced Joy must be sent for ; either she must come back at once and take charge of Gladys, or

he should take the child to Egypt with him. He was very peremptory, and requested Mr. Oxburgh to write and say Joy must come home at once. After this letter was gone he recovered his temper to some extent, but only to lose it again when Joy's answer came two days later.

Joy was very sorry, but she could not possibly come home till the end of the week—she had a tennis party every day—but she would come on Saturday, and was quite sure Gladys would not have forgotten her, and would settle down perfectly by the Monday, and Joy understood the child's father did not leave till the middle of the week.

Jack was angrier than ever; he went out after breakfast, and they saw no more of him till dinner-time, when he came in very tired, but resigned to await Joy's tardy arrival.

He could not understand her at all, wasting her time at tennis parties when she might have been spending these four or five precious days in his society, cultivating Gladys' affection. It was most unkind and selfish of her; he should not have thought she could be so frivolous, and he should tell her so when she did come.

Or was it possible she dared not trust herself to meet him? Was she so deeply in love with him that, believing he had ceased to care for her, she wished to avoid him? Or was she coy, and ashamed to see him since she had broken off her engagement?

These last suppositions were more flattering to his masculine vanity, so he adopted them, and kicked his heels about aimlessly during the hours that elapsed till Joy was expected.

He did not choose to be at home when she arrived, but he came in from the grounds, where he had been hiding, about half-an-hour later, and found Joy—not pale and sad, as he had expected, but fresh and gay, and blooming, and in excellent spirits.

How sweet she looked in her cream-coloured dress, with some roses Perriam had given her at her throat; her great eyes radiant with joy, her colour coming and going, and giving some of that variety which was the great charm of her style of beauty, her pretty auburn hair rather disordered by travelling; her sweet mouth smiling and showing her pretty teeth, which were one of her strong points.

"I am so glad you are going to Egypt," she exclaimed, when The Captain, who had been absorbing most of her attention since her arrival, had somewhat subsided.

How Jack hated that dog, privileged as it was to be Joy's most constant companion.

"Thank you. It is not usual for one's friends to rejoice when one is ordered abroad. However, there is a charm in all novelty," he answered huffily.

"I suppose not; but under the circumstances I am delighted," continued Joy.

They were taking tea in Mrs. Oxburgh's room when this conversation took place.

"What circumstances?" said Lockwood stiffly.

"Why, leaving Gladys with us. I am charmed at the arrangement; for though I am very fond of Lance, he is not the same as Gladys," said Joy.

"I wonder you did not come home directly you heard she was here!" gloomily remarked Jack.

"So I did, as soon as I could tear myself away from the gaieties, didn't I, mother dear?" and Joy sank down by her mother's side and began to tell her all about her visit.

Mr. Lockwood sat listening and watching her, secretly wondering at the change which had come over her. Had she ceased to care for him? Was she acting a part, or did she really feel as indifferent to him as she appeared to do? He could not tell.

"Where is Gladys? I am longing to see her," said Joy at last.

"She is with Rose and Lance in the park. Will you come and see her, or are you too tired?" said Jack.

"Yes, I will come. I am not in the least tired," said Joy, as they went through the hall, where she put on a great straw hat, which looked like a halo round her sweet fair face.

"Why didn't you come back sooner?" said Jack moodily, as he walked by her side.

"There was no reason for coming," said Joy.

"There was an excellent reason: I wanted you," said Jack.

"So did the people with whom I was staying," said Joy mischievously.

"Was their claim greater than mine?" said he in a satirical tone.

"Much. They are nearer relations; you are only a cousin by marriage. They are my first cousins."

"Relationship has nothing to do with it; relations are often less than mere acquaintances," said Lockwood.

"I don't agree with you. Blood is thicker than water," said Joy.

How dare she talk in this style? thought Jack, turning pale with half-suppressed passion, as he seized Joy's arm and drew her towards him, when a child's cry of delight reached their ears.

"Here se is; here is Joy—auntie. Let me go, Rose," cried Gladys, who, espying Joy in the distance, ran across the lawn towards them.

For once in his life Jack thought the child in the way, but afterwards, when he reflected on the matter, he came to the conclusion the interruption was well-timed.

What would he have said to her but for Gladys? What could he say?

What right had he to exact more from her? Was not she doing far more for him now than he had any right to expect?

Was there any one else in the world who would take care of his children as she was doing?

He knew he was wrong, and perhaps for this very reason he was crosser than ever all the next day. He was cross with himself for having been so bearish to her; and how sweet-tempered she was to him notwithstanding.

How bright and happy Joy seemed, like a sunbeam in the house. No wonder the children were so fond of her: and how she romped and played with them. Jack was jealous of his own children; they monopolized so much of her time. Surely she might spare time to entertain him, seeing that his visit was so soon to come to an end. She would have the children when he was gone.

But Joy seemed quite unconscious that she was neglecting him; in fact, she took care after that first day never to be alone with him again, and this annoyed him. He wanted to be alone with her; he wanted to tell her he loved her in spite of the barrier which separated them: he wanted to know if she still cared for him; he could not go to Egypt unless he knew that.

Oh! the cruel fate which separated them. Here at Oxburgh, seeing her daily, living in the same house, breathing the same air, he seemed further off her than ever; for the place to him was haunted by the ghost of Amy. Her death was still so fresh in

his memory, his remorse was still so keen that the idea of marrying again was one he ruthlessly dismissed as impossible whenever it occurred.

But to love each other, that was not forbidden by any law of God or man ; and yet Joy appeared to have ceased to love him. He must know if this were so ; he must see her alone before he sailed ; he must know the truth.

Had he a rival ?

For whom had she dismissed Major Graham ? For him or for some one else ?

Surely he had the right to know this. He would know it. He would ask her ; he would tell her he wanted to speak to her, and have it out before he left.

So on the eve of his departure he asked Joy to come for a walk in the park with him, ostensibly to receive some parting instructions about Gladys, and Joy fell into the trap and went.

"How long will you stay in Egypt ?" said Joy.

"It is a five years' station. I shall be gone five years, unless anything unforeseen should call me back sooner."

"Five years ; it is a long time. Gladys will be getting quite a big girl by then. How she will miss you, poor little mite," said Joy.

"Children soon forget. I wonder if any one else will miss me besides Gladys," said Lockwood, turning his pale face to his companion, who was pulling a flower to pieces and scattering the petals in their path, her great eyes cast down to the ground.

He watched her narrowly, and his quick eyes detected a quiver in her lip and a passing blush flit like a rosy cloud over her face.

"Lance will a little, but he is too young to remember long," said Joy.

"Lance is a baby ; I was not thinking of him. Will you miss me, Joy ?"

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name since Amy's death, and it made Joy tremble.

"I don't know," she said.

"But I want to know. Tell me, Joy, will you miss me a little ?"

"We shall all miss you," said Joy gently.

But this was not what he wanted ; such generalities would not satisfy the craving at his heart. He wanted to be assured that

Joy would miss him, and he was by no means sure that she would ; he could not read her feelings, and he could not go away in this uncertainty ; he must know if she still cared for him. She puzzled him, and he thought angrily she made it so much harder for him, for now that he suspected he had a rival he loved her more than ever.

"Joy, may I ask you something ?" he said.

"I don't know ; what is it ?" said Joy.

"Is it all quite over with you and Graham ?"

"Yes, quite ; I shall never marry," said Joy.

"Nor I again. But, Joy, I shall never cease to love ——"

"Hush, I did not come out here to talk nonsense ; I came to talk about Gladys. What am I to do if she is ever dangerously ill ?"

"Telegraph for me and I will come. You will write to me every mail, won't you ?"

"I won't promise that ; some one shall. But I hate writing letters ; you shall hear from some of us every week."

How cool she was ; he might be nothing to her, she spoke so unconcernedly, and she was all the world to him ; what would he not give to hold her once in his arms before he left ?

But just then they were passing near the spot where Amy had been found, and the memory of her rose up between them and prevented him.

They could never be more than they were to each other ; why make it harder for both to part ?

And so he checked the impulse, and the next day he left without another word of love being spoke between them.

He knew she would never marry, and that was some consolation ; but whether she would remain single for his sake, he was not so sure ; her conduct had baffled him ; she was a mystery he could not solve, and life was dull and flat.

However, he had only himself to thank ; he had built his house on the sand and great had been the fall thereof.

## CHAPTER XL.

### MISS LYDIA RUNS AWAY.

MISS LYDIA was supremely happy during the first week she spent in the Protestant convent dedicated to St. Stanislaus Kostka, a Jesuit saint, whose statue adorned the refectory, in

which the sisters, with Miss Lydia at the tail of them, took their meals.

Her duties were very light ; she had to do her own room and dust the guest-room, to work at some church embroidery, and to attend all the services in the chapel ; the rest of her time could be occupied as she pleased.

The second week she was less enthusiastic ; the meals tried her ; she was required to eat all that was set before her, and she was a dainty little creature and had great difficulty in forcing some of the food down.

The dress was also a trial : during her chrysalis period she had to wear an ugly white cap tied under her chin, and a still uglier little black cape on her shoulders ; but she bore this with more equanimity than the food, because one day she would be clothed in the wing-like veil of a novice and the black cape would be discarded, so the dress was only a temporary affliction.

The third week the life began to pall ; even the delightful services in the chapel after a time grew monotonous, notwithstanding the piquancy attaching to them from the fact that they were altogether at variance with the spirit and tone of the Church of England, and the ritual employed forbidden by her laws.

Sweet as forbidden fruit proverbially is, Miss Lydia grew tired of it ; moreover she had seen the real thing so often in the Catholic church, that this imitation had not even the charm of novelty for her. It was only naughty ; it was not even nice.

Then Miss Lydia's age was a trial to her ; the novices were all much younger than she was, though none of them were under twenty-five ; the superioress was about the same age as Miss Lydia, the novice-mistress much younger, and she found it by no means easy to have to obey scrupulously women younger and less experienced than herself.

But when Miss Lydia had been a month in the establishment, matters reached a climax, and she arrived at the conclusion that the religious life as practised in the Protestant convent of St. Stanislaus Kostka was not the bed of roses she had anticipated, and she began to think she must escape from it.

One of the rites of this would-be nunnery was that the beds must all be made in a particular way ; there was a certain angle at which the top sheet must be turned down over the counterpane, and if this rule was not strictly observed, the bed was

liable to be unmade, and the occupant had the trouble of remaking it.

Now Miss Lydia was not an adept in the art of bedmaking, and the method adopted by St. Stanislaus Kostka's votaries was not one that commended itself to her; her own method struck her as a far better one, so Miss Lydia turned her bed down as the housemaid at Saumarez Cottage was wont to do.

This was not discovered for a week, and then she was shown the mistake and requested to adopt the fashion of bedmaking patronized by St. Stanislaus. For two or three days Miss Lydia complied; then she lapsed again into the Saumarez fashion of bedmaking, and to her disgust found her bed all unmade a few nights later when she went to her room for the night.

This roused the good lady's temper; she had not very much, but when it was roused she was as obstinate as a mule, and the next day she wilfully made her bed in the Saumarez fashion, and at night found it unmade and the clothes on the floor. The next day and the next the same thing occurred; the bed was made by Miss Lydia in her way in the morning and unmade by the novice-mistress in the evening. This little game was played for a week, Miss Lydia enjoying her own naughtiness, though disliking the task of making her bed twice a day.

At the end of the week the "reverend mother" was informed of what was going on, and Miss Lydia was sent for to that lady's private room just before "compline." She went in inwardly trembling and made the required courtesy to the superioress, who remained seated, but did not offer her visitor a chair.

"Miss Keppel, I understand from Sister Mary Stanislaus you are unable to make your bed properly. I am surprised that, at your age, you are incapable of doing so simple a thing as making a bed."

"I beg your pardon, but I can and do make my bed every day, reverend mother, and every day Sister Mary Stanislaus unmakes it."

"Because it is not properly made. To-morrow morning you will make it in my presence, and as a penance you will then unmake and make every bed in the house. You may go now," said the "reverend mother" severely, and Miss Lydia courtesied and retired, muttering to herself in a determined little voice:

"I intend to go."

Now there was nothing to prevent this good lady from leaving the sisterhood that evening ; she had but to tell the superioress she wished to go, and though she might have advised her to remain till the next day, she could not have insisted upon it, as Miss Lydia was, as yet, under no vows. But this was far too commonplace a method of leaving to suit so romantic a body ; she wished to do the thing in as exciting a way as possible ; she wished the finale to her religious life to be striking ; she wished to go out with a flare ; she wished to pose as an escaped nun ; she wished, in short, to run away, and she determined to do so.

It was next door to an elopement ; in fact Miss Lydia thought it might very well be called an elopement ; there was only one thing wanting, namely, the bridegroom ; true, a bridegroom is an important factor in an elopement, but failing a bridegroom, it was in Miss Lydia's opinion better to elope without one than not to elope at all.

"Everything comes to him who knows how to wait," says the proverb, and all her life Miss Lydia had been waiting for some such exciting event to come to her ; now, at last, the opportunity had come and she meant to seize it.

Miss Dorcas had eloped ; Miss Lydia would run away ; that was certainly next door to eloping, if not precisely the same thing, and so instead of going into the chapel to "compline," she went to her own room to make her plans and, if feasible, put them into execution. She had no time to lose, for every one in the house went to "compline," after which the doors would all be locked and the keys carried up to the portress's cell.

It was, therefore, a case of now or never, for the sisters would be out of the chapel again in less than a quarter of an hour, and then there would be no possibility of escape that night, and if she waited till the next day, the chances were she would be ignominiously dismissed.

For Miss Lydia was fully determined no power on earth should induce her to make her bed in any fashion but her own ; and she was aware an open rebellion on her part would inevitably end in dismissal.

So the little lady tripped upstairs to her room, put all the money she had with her into her purse, packed a few things for the night in a little handbag ; took off for ever the little cape

and the hideous cap, threw them on the floor in a little outburst of temper, and then donned a travelling cloak and a bonnet and emerged from her room on to the corridor.

Here she could hear the singing in the chapel, and she paused to listen to discover how far the sisters had got in the service.

It was a Thursday night, and it was the custom on Thursday to conclude "compline" with singing the Latin hymn, "Tantum Ergo," used at benediction in the Catholic Church.

This was one of the things done at St. Stanislaus Kostka's Home which struck Miss Lydia as meaningless; and not even the fact that it was so very Catholic to sing a Latin hymn reconciled her to the other fact that it was a sham to sing that particular one before an empty altar.

"They are singing 'Tantum Ergo'; they will be out directly. I must fly or I shall be caught," said Lydia to herself, as with beating heart and flushed cheeks she tripped lightly down the stone stairs into the lower corridor, at one end of which was a door into the chapel, at the other the entrance hall and the hall door.

She ran rapidly down the corridor, for the music had ceased while she was on the stairs, a few seconds more and it would be too late; the chapel door opened as she reached the entrance hall. Her heart thumped violently, her fingers trembled as she fumbled with the lock, she could hear the steps of the sisters approaching nearer and nearer as they filed down the corridor; another second or two and the portress would be in the entrance hall.

Oh! this stupid lock, would it never open?

Yes, at last, the handle turned, the door opened, the night air cooled her flushed cheeks, liberty was before her; she stepped out, closed the door without latching it behind her, and ran down the street and round the first corner as fast as her feet could carry her, wondering as she ran if the passers-by would guess she was an escaped nun, for so she chose to all herself.

She was not missed that night, though the unlatched door caused the portress a great deal of perturbation and anxiety, for if she had left it open herself she would very likely be deprived of her office for her carelessness. But the next morning, just as the "reverend mother" was about to proceed to her room to witness the bedmaking operation, prepared to remain there and

unmake the bed as often as it pleased Miss Lydia to make it wrongly, bent on having it made à la St. Stanislaus, she received a visit from the novice-mistress.

This lady came to inform the superioress of Miss Lydia's disappearance ; her bed was unmade and evidently had not been slept in, and this, coupled with the confession of the portress that the street door was found open after "compline," pointed to the conclusion the runaway must have left the previous evening.

"It must be hushed up ; it will never do to let the novices hear of it. We must say she was summoned home suddenly. I only hope she has got home safely, but she is not at all the kind of person to be alone in London at nine or ten o'clock at night. We must communicate with her sister at once. She would never have done for us, she is too old to be moulded, but her income was a great temptation," said the "reverend mother."

It was true that Miss Lydia was quite out of her element when, ten minutes after leaving St. Stanislaus Kostka's Home, she found herself in a crowded London thoroughfare, without the slightest notion where she was or where she meant to go.

The lights dazzled her, the horse traffic frightened her, the noise deafened her, the foot passengers jostled her ; she felt unable to collect her thoughts ; breathless from running, her first idea was to get a cab, but she did not know how to proceed to secure this coveted object. There were plenty passing, but the drivers paid no attention to her feeble efforts to attract them ; at last some kind-hearted man took compassion on her and hailed a four-wheeler, into which the little lady jumped with alacrity.

She was safe here from the jostling crowd, and she could not be run over ; she had secured herself from that danger ; but a new difficulty arose : the cabman desired to know where she wished to be driven to, and Miss Lydia, not knowing herself, could not tell him.

"Where to, ma'am ?" said the cabman, poking his head in at the window as he fastened the door of the cab.

"I don't know," panted Miss Lydia.

"Blessed if I do, then," said the cabman.

"Drive, drive slowly, please ; I am very nervous," said Miss Lydia.

"All right ma'am ; my horse is as quiet as a lamb. Where shall I drive to ?"

"I really don't know ; I—I am so overcome. Drive on, please, or we shall have a crowd collect," gasped the trembling runaway.

"Where did you come from, ma'am? Shall I take you back?" suggested the cabman.

"No, no, no; I—I don't know where I came from. Where am I?" cried Miss Lydia, in a fever of fear at the mere idea of being taken back to St. Stanislaus Kostka's Home.

"Well, this is a rum customer. Don't know where she is going to, where she came from, or where she is. Guess I had better drive her to Bedlam," muttered the cabman.

"Do you live near here, ma'am?" he inquired.

"No. I live in Jersey."

"I can't drive you home, then; my horse don't swim. Shall I take you to a nice quiet hotel?" suggested the cabman.

"No, I never went to an hotel alone in my life," exclaimed Miss Lydia, thinking of stories of beds which descended through trap-doors; of murderous landlords, of gentlemen addicted to mistaking a maiden lady's bedroom for their own, like Mr. Pickwick.

"Well, ma'am, I shall have to move on directly; here is a policeman coming up. If you can't think of any place to go to, you had better get out, unless you wish to go for a drive," said the cabman.

The mention of a policeman stimulated Miss Lydia's brain to evolve a suggestion of some one whom she knew by name, who might take compassion on her; she had not the remotest idea in what part of London that some one lived, but in the simplicity of her heart she trusted that the cabman might be better informed.

"Do you know a gentleman named Selsey?"

"Can't say that I do, ma'am," said the cabman aloud.

"Guess this here little lady was born yesterday, and born silly," he muttered inwardly.

"He is a clergyman; his church is somewhere in the East End of London, and he has lecture halls and homes for distressed people."

"To be sure, I know that Mr. Selsey; at least I know where to find him; it is four miles from here. I'll take you there, ma'am, right enough," said the cabby, rejoiced at this solution of the difficulty.

He knew Mr. Selsey by name very well ; he knew his church, and once in the neighbourhood he had no difficulty in finding his house, whither, soon after ten o'clock, he landed Miss Lydia, who to her intense relief, was told on inquiring that both Mr. and Mrs. Selsey were at home.

### CHAPTER XLI.

#### MISS LYDIA SETTLES DOWN.

FELIX OXBURGH was dining with the Selseys the evening Miss Lydia eloped from the Home of St. Stanilaus Kostka, which event took place a few days after Major Graham and Jack Lockwood sailed for Egypt.

Mr. Selsey was sitting on a stool at his wife's feet when Felix was announced, and as he saw the expression of perfect happiness on Frances' face reflected in that of her husband gazing up at her, an involuntary sigh escaped him.

Was it one of regret for what he was renouncing ? Perhaps, for self-renunciation is not a painless virtue ; there would be little virtue in it if it were ; the martyr feels the fierce pain of burning though he is willing to be bound to the stake, and Felix was by no means insensible to the fact that he was giving up earth's sweetest joys by entering the priesthood.

" Welcome always, Felix, doubly welcome to-night ; Frances has been scolding me roundly, telling me my temper is unbearable, that I ought to be ashamed of myself for giving way to it, et cetera. I assure you there is no one like the wife of one's bosom for telling one home truths," said Mr. Selsey, rising from his lowly seat.

" At any rate, I always tell you them in private," said Frances blushing and looking fondly at her husband.

" I know you do ; you are a model wife in public, that is the worst of it. Strangers would imagine you worshipped me, from the crown of my hat to the soles of my boots ; that you were the most obedient of wives, hanging on every word which dropped from my lips," said Mr. Selsey.

" And is she nothing of the kind ? " asked Felix, in an amused tone.

" Oh, outwardly, yes. No one has the least idea of what I undergo in private, though ; but I don't mind telling you, Felix, she abuses me like a pickpocket sometimes ; her one saving grace

is she administers her curtain-lectures in the day time ; she does not keep me awake, as her prototype, Mrs. Caudle, was wont to do to the unfortunate Caudle."

"I'm sure it is very seldom I take you to task, Tom ; but I observe when I do, the effect is as salutary as a whipping is to the twins."

"I only wish you had twin husbands as well as twin sons, and then I could expiate my offences vicariously, as they do, They are never both punished at once, Felix ; they take it in turns, Frances' idea being the boy that is not punished suffers as much mentally as the boy that is whipped does physically, so she economizes her chastisements. Never mind, Frances ; they will soon be old enough for me to take them in hand," said Mr. Selsey with a wink at Felix.

"I am sure they won't. Don't talk such nonsense," said Frances rather warmly as dinner was announced.

Later on in the evening, when they had gone back to the drawing-room, the conversation turned on Jack Lockwood, who had paid the Selsseys a short visit on his way back from Oxburgh to Plymouth.

"He is very much changed since Amy's death ; he looks years older. He feels it far more than I should have expected, for it certainly was not a happy marriage," said Frances.

"Perhaps there is a certain amount of remorse mixed with his grief ; it struck me there was," said Mr. Selsey.

"I am afraid he blames himself unjustly. He was an excellent husband. He is a fine character, is Lockwood, and a most unselfish man. I only hope he won't sacrifice his happiness and Joy's to a mistaken sense of duty ; but he is conscientious almost to a fault," said Felix.

"Poor fellow ; it was a disastrous affair from beginning to end, but the end was so terrible it makes one feel lenient to his wife," said Mr. Selsey.

"She was greatly to blame. Her vanity has wrecked two lives besides her own," said Frances, with the usual severity of her sex when passing judgment on another woman.

"She was greatly to be praised, too, in some ways, and to be pitied infinitely, Frances," said Felix rather sharply, while Mr. Selsey made a comic gesture at his wife to imply that her turn to be lectured had come.

"Praised for her beauty and attractiveness, do you mean?" said Frances.

"No; I mean for her virtues. Few women have had greater temptation than Amy had. She was an acknowledged belle and very fascinating; she had half-a-dozen men madly in love with her; and yet even in Jersey, where scandal is rife, not one breath of slander ever tarnished her name. She was a most loyal wife, and pure as the driven snow she chose for her shroud," said Felix.

"Felix, you are a genius," interrupted Mr. Selsey.

"Why? Because I am not blind to poor Amy's good points?"

"No; because I conceive the work of a genius to be to point out the divine element in his fellow-creatures; and the proof of genius is the power a man manifests, first in discerning and then in showing to others the divine nature. You have that power. In a certain sense St. John the Baptist was to my mind the greatest genius the world has ever produced. He recognized God, and pointed Him out to His disciples when he saw Him walking by the sea-shore."

"I know nothing about his genius; I only know he was the greatest prophet the world has ever seen," said Felix.

"Prophecy is a phase of genius; both are sparks of the divine fire; but I won't shock you, Felix, with my unorthodox views," said Mr. Selsey.

"Rather let us see if Felix's genius, as you define it, will enable him to point out the divine element in the nature of that foolish little woman Jack was telling us about the other day," said Mrs. Selsey.

"Oh, yes, Felix, by-the-way. So I hear you made a conquest in Jersey, and nearly made what you would call a convert into the bargain."

"What do you mean?" asked Felix.

"Now, now, Felix, don't affect ignorance. Surely you know your own power? You know a certain little lady was so desperately in love with you that she first nearly turned Catholic for your sake, and then, when she heard you were going to be a priest, she went into a Protestant nunnery?"

"Don't, Selsey. I have no idea to whom you are referring."

"Why, to Miss Lydia Keppel, of course."

"Miss Lydia! Why, she is nearly as old as my mother; there can't be a word of truth in such nonsense."

"There is. Miss Keppel was so angry with her that she told Jack all about it. I believe Miss Lydia even went so far as to order her *trousseau*. Felix, you have been behaving very badly, I am afraid," said Frances.

"But the thing is impossible," objected Felix, in blank amazement.

"My dear fellow, nothing is impossible to the gentler sex; and I should say the number of women who would find it impossible to fall in love with you is limited, particularly if you encouraged them as you appear to have encouraged Miss Lydia," said Mr. Selsey, who delighted in thus teasing his brother-in-law.

"But, Tom, you can't think that I ever for one moment attempted to raise such ridiculous hopes? It is too absurd."

"Women are very absurd sometimes."

"So are men. But now, Felix, point out the divine in Miss Lydia, please. Tom is only chaffing you; we know you never gave her the slightest cause for such supreme folly. Now prove your genius as defined by Tom," said Mrs. Selsey.

"Tell you Miss Lydia's good points? Well, as far as I know I should say her nature was gentle, submissive, easily led, obedient, and from such material a saint might be made," said Felix.

"If you please, sir, Miss Lydia Keppel wishes to speak to you. She has driven up in a cab," interrupted a servant.

"Talk of the angels! Miss Lydia Keppel! I'll come immediately. I say, Felix, she means business. Hadn't you better hide?" said Mr. Selsey in an aside to Felix, as he followed the servant into the hall.

"What can she be doing here at this time of night? I thought you said she was in a Protestant convent, Frances?" said Felix.

"So she was. My belief is she has run away. Wait till I come back; my curiosity is so intensely excited, I must go and see," said Frances, leaving Felix to go and see what brought Miss Lydia to her house that evening.

She put her head into the room a few minutes later to say:

"She has run away from the convent. I was right. How about her obedience now, Felix?"

"I will wait till I know some details," said Felix.

A few minutes later Mr. Selsey led Miss Lydia into the drawing-room, and her fluttering manner when she saw Felix testified that there was some truth in Jack's story.

"Why, Miss Lydia, this is a surprise. I had just heard you had gone to be a Protestant nun, which sounds like a contradiction in terms," said Felix cordially.

"So I was; but I have been very wicked, I am afraid. I have run away," said Miss Lydia.

"My dear lady, if you ask my opinion, it is about the most sensible thing you could have done. If you wish to be a nun, you must first of all leave the Church of England for the Church of Rome," said Mr. Selsey.

"I almost think you are right. You see, Mr. Oxburgh, I am like King Agrippa—I am almost persuaded," said Miss Lydia.

"Let us hope 'almost' may soon become quite," said Felix gravely.

"What made you run away?" said Frances; and Miss Lydia told the story of the bedmaking, at which Mr. Selsey made merry.

"Felix, I am afraid your character of a genius is trembling in the balance. How about the obedience and submission you spoke of?" said Frances in an undertone to her brother.

"Wait a moment. Miss Lydia, would you mind telling us what induced you to go there?" asked Felix.

"My director urged it. He thought I had a vocation, and so I obeyed him," said Miss Lydia.

"There, Frances; you see I was right, after all," said Felix.

"My dear Miss Lydia, would not you like to go to your room?" she said aloud.

Miss Lydia assented, and she went upstairs, wondering what strange fate had brought her and Felix together again. Fortunately for her, Felix was in deacon's orders now and in clerical dress, so there was no room for any more hope of catching him. So abandoning this hope, Miss Lydia resolved to constitute him her spiritual adviser, and during the week she spent with the Selseys she discussed all her religious difficulties with him.

Felix, however, would not hear of her being received into the Church at present, but insisted on her waiting at least six months before she made up her mind. So she went back to Jersey armed with a small library of Catholic works, resolved never to

enter a Protestant church again after her experience of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Home.

Miss Keppel was inclined to be rather hard on her sister at first, and made some very satirical remarks ; but Miss Lydia was very gentle, and expressed such genuine regret for her foolish conduct, that the elder sister was mollified and peace was restored.

Major Graham's little girls were installed at Saumarez when Miss Lydia returned, and the children's voices brightened the lives of the two ladies and made their charming home more home-like than ever.

Miss Lydia had now only one fear, namely, that the domestic peace would be once more disturbed when she announced the fact that she meant to be a Catholic ; but, to her great relief, Miss Keppel one day took up a controversial book she was reading and said :

"Lydia, my advice to you is, go over to Rome. You will never be satisfied until you are there. It will suit you exactly. You require leading : you will be led. Obedience is necessary for your happiness. You will have to obey the priest. You have no private judgment : there you need none. The Church decides what you are to believe. All you have to do is to believe it—if you can. You can ; I can't. If I could I should follow your example, for I have the greatest respect for an honest *bona fide* Catholic. Take my advice and become one."

"I mean to, when I am considered prepared, Sophy. I was afraid you would be angry. But I really have sown my wild oats now, and I mean to settle down in real earnest," said Miss Lydia humbly.

And having "eloped" once, let us hope she will keep her resolution.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### JACK RETURNS.

"Welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough."

JOY was not really so insusceptible to Jack's influence as he had imagined. It was as hard for her to part as for him—harder, perhaps, since she was remaining at home, while he had the advantage of fresh scenes and fresh interests to divert his thoughts from her.

She had not ceased to care for him, as he half thought, nor had he any rival in her heart. The change in her manner to him was not difficult to explain. She had been miserable while engaged to Major Graham, because on Amy's death she woke to the fact that she still loved Jack with all the ardour of first love. She had been miserable also because of Jack's coldness to her during his first visit to Oxburgh after his wife's death.

But when she broke off her engagement with Major Graham, her heart grew light again, and second thoughts told her that under the circumstances Jack could not well be anything but distant to her just then. He could not be making love to her directly after his wife's death ; it would not be decent.

So hope revived in Joy's heart, and she trusted that some day—a long way off, perhaps—her heart's desire would be granted her. Then when she heard Jack was going to Egypt, but was coming to Oxburgh first, a great fit of shyness seized her. She began to think she had been forward. Jack would suspect she had dismissed Major Graham for his sake. It behoved her to be very distant in order to dispel this idea. Accordingly, she chose to be absent from home when he arrived, and did not choose to hurry home at his bidding ; and when she did come home, took care not to be left alone with him.

Joy was not the least bit of a flirt, but she was a coquette. She would never lead a man on whom she did not care for, but she would pretend to run away from the advances of the man she loved. To some extent this was natural to her. She was like many other women—she could not help it, even if it ruined her own happiness, as coquetry has wrecked the lives of many women ; for men are very vain, and few can stand being snubbed.

And so she had coquetted with Jack and sent him away doubting her love ; and, of course, no sooner was the door closed on him than she would have given the whole world to call him back. Like many another coquette she was reaping the fruits of her folly. There is this difference, among others, between a coquette and a flirt : a flirt endangers the happiness of others ; a coquette endangers her own happiness.

To return to Joy. Then came a reaction, and, from being the sunbeam of the house, for weeks she was in the depths. The children worried her. She took no interest in anything. Perriam's flowers seemed to flaunt her ; she hated the sight of them.

All her home duties were distasteful ; she did not care what there was for dinner so long as the cook suggested something, and did not leave it to her to think of. She had no appetite. She could not sleep ; when she did, it was only to dream of Jack and wake up to find he was gone to Egypt for five long weary years.

Five years ! He had not been gone five weeks, and they seemed an eternity. How should she live for five years without the sight of his face, without the sound of his voice, without the touch of his hand ? Why, they would be five years of blindness, deafness, death, for he was all the whole world to her. So she told herself. Poor Joy ! It is hardly fair to look at her just now, poor struggling, rebellious child. There is nothing heroic in her conduct ; she is going through the furnace which hundreds of girls have passed through before, and hundreds more will pass through in the future ; and her conduct is no better than that of ninety-nine out of every hundred of those thousands.

At the end of six weeks Mr. Oxburgh had had enough of it—Felix was studying for the priesthood and could not come down to Oxburgh; Joy refused to go away from home, so the squire sent for the Selseys to come and pay them a visit, to rouse Joy, as he expressed it.

For the first day or two Mr. Selsey watched Joy, while pretending not to do anything of the kind. He noticed her listlessness, her want of interest in everything, her heavy eyes, which told of want of sleep and of weeping, her want of appetite, her fancy for taking far too long a walk with The Captain one day, and refusal to stir out on the next, and then he made up his mind what to do.

"Joy, I have to go home to-day for a few days, and I want you to come with me," he announced at breakfast a few days after he arrived.

Joy made several objections, but he parried them all. Frances would attend to Joy's duties and look after the children ; the change would do her good. And finally, Mr. Selsey, while protesting he must go, vowed he would not go without her, so Joy reluctantly went.

He was very good to her ; he did not worry her to talk when she wished to be silent. He made her as comfortable as possible during the journey and on her arrival at his house ; but for the

next few days Joy failed to discover what business had brought him to London, for his time was entirely devoted to her.

Every evening he took her to a theatre; in the afternoon they went for a long drive; but the mornings were devoted to sightseeing of a peculiar kind. The first morning they visited a prison and went all over it; the next day they went over a workhouse; the next morning was spent in going over a hospital for incurables, and then Joy began to wonder what her brother-in-law meant by showing her so much suffering.

The fourth day he told her to dress herself as plainly as possible, as he wanted to take her to some of the worst parts of London; and that morning Joy learnt more of the poverty and misery of the London poor than she had ever known of before. Mr. Selsey showed her such scenes of misery as she had before had no conception of, and when he told her there was far worse to be seen, Joy begged to be spared, and went home very thoughtful.

She was very silent during lunch, but afterwards, when the servant had left the room, she went over to the hearthrug, where Mr. Selsey was standing with his back to the fire, after the manner of Englishmen, and said abruptly:

"Tom, I have been an odious, selfish little toad. Why didn't you tell me so point-blank?"

"Because I thought it more polite to tell you indirectly. I was not sure how you would take it if I spoke more plainly. You see, Joy, unfortunately for you, I am only your brother-in-law, not your husband, so there is a certain amount of conventional civility I am bound to observe."

Mr. Selsey's tone was jocular, but Joy knew well enough he meant what he said, except his joke about being her husband; and she felt sure her suspicion that he had purposely taken her to these scenes of woe to show her how much others had to suffer, and how much she had to be thankful for, was correct.

"You have been very kind to me, Tom. Thank you," said Joy gently; and there was such a world of repentance in that one little word, "thank you," that Mr. Selsey felt sure his lesson had taken effect.

He turned round, and laying the pipe he was about to fill on the chimney-piece, took Joy's hands in his, and looking straight into her sweet eyes, said:

"Joy, I don't think there is any need for us to visit any more

scenes of woe. I should like to-morrow to show you my feeble efforts at alleviating some of it—they are only a drop in the ocean, it is true—and the next day we will go back to Oxburgh, unless you would like another week of theatres."

"No. I am ready to go back to-day, if you like, or to-morrow."

"No. I have taken tickets for to-night and to-morrow at the theatre. We will go back the day after to-morrow, and you will show them what a good doctor I am, won't you?" and he stooped and kissed Joy's fresh young face—after which she ran away to hide the tears that would come although unbidden.

Joy went home a very different being to the love-sick girl who had gone away a week before. She roused herself from her selfish sorrow, and threw herself heart and soul into the care of Jack's children; and as, fortunately for her, there was plenty of work for her to do, what with an invalid mother to amuse, the children and the housekeeping to see after, she soon got back her sleep and appetite, and with them her spirits.

Work is a panacea for many ills; and the "tired woman's heaven of doing nothing for ever and ever," would be a hell to most people.

Of course Joy had her moments—days sometimes—of depression, when the longing for Jack's love was almost unbearable; and Time's pace was so hard that it seemed the length of seven years. But she did her best to shake off melancholy, the sin for which Dante had so little mercy.

Every mail brought a letter from Jack Lockwood, sometimes to Joy, sometimes to her father or mother, and the Egyptian mail days were red-letter days in Joy's calendar.

Time went on, and the second winter after Amy's death and Jack's departure set in. Up to that Christmas Jack had never once missed writing, but when the first mail in the New Year came it brought no letter from him. It was Joy's turn for a letter, and she was sadly disappointed at not getting one; but when the next week came and no letter arrived, even the squire was surprised and expressed his astonishment. But the third week, when the mail only brought Joy a letter from Major Graham, telling her of his approaching marriage with a lady he had met in Cairo, the astonishment increased to anxiety, particularly as there was no mention of Jack in Major Graham's letter.

The squire fidgeted about the house, in and out of his wife's room, all the morning, and talked about telegraphing to Cairo to know what was the matter, but Joy discouraged this idea, saying if anything had happened to Jack, Major Graham would have let them know.

"But why doesn't he write? To miss three mails, when he always writes every mail, is most extraordinary," fumed the squire.

"I don't know," said Joy, but in her heart she thought the next mail would bring the news of Captain Lockwood's marriage, for he got his company the last summer.

She had scarcely spoken, when the door was thrown open, and Captain Lockwood was announced. Joy turned red and white, and hot and cold, and nearly fell over the two children and The Captain, who were playing at her feet, as she rose to greet him.

"Gladys, here is father. Don't you remember him?" said Joy, seizing Gladys in her arms, and trying to rouse the child's delight to hide her own intense pleasure at the unexpected arrival.

Gladys, however, was shy, and shrank away for a moment from her father, clinging to Joy. It was but for a moment, though; directly she heard his voice her memory returned, and with a cry of delight she sprang into his outstretched arms and covered his handsome bronzed face with her kisses.

"Father, darling, Gladys is so glad; Lance is glad; Joy—auntie is glad. Do look at her," cried Gladys, when she could speak.

Joy, who was blushing the colour of a peony, stooped down to pick up Lance, and hid her face behind his golden curls, but not before Captain Lockwood had read his welcome in her eyes.

He was altered; he was bronzed, but besides that his formerly somewhat mobile features were hardened, and he looked as if he had seen sorrow; his smile was less frequent than in his bachelor days, but it was sweeter; his eyes, always expressive, had now a sad look in them, which gave an interest to his face, and struck a chord of sympathy in Joy's heart. He was improved in appearance, it was difficult to say how, but he was undoubtedly strikingly handsome now. Even Mr. Oxburgh thought so as he

watched him with Gladys on one of his knees and Lance on the other, listening to their pretty prattle and pressing them alternately to his breast.

Joy sat looking on, with the faithful Captain in her arms, laughing and pretending to be jealous, saying after all a dog was the only faithful friend, while The Captain, delighted to find himself so important, curled himself up on her lap and licked her hands gratefully.

In the midst of this scene the squire came in to pay one of his frequent visits to his wife, from whom he was seldom absent more than a few hours at a time.

"Here we are, Mary—three generations of us—past, present and future."

"What do you mean, John? I don't understand you," said pretty Mrs. Oxburgh.

"Why, the children are the future, Jack and Joy the present, and we the past."

"Passing, if you like, John, but we are not the past yet, though we have grandchildren," said Mrs. Oxburgh.

"Well, I am the past, and you are passing—passing fair, my love, as ever," whispered the squire.

"And you are as silly as ever, John."

"Because my love for you is exceeding great—passing the love of women. Is that silly?" said the squire.

"Perhaps. I wish the present generation were as silly as the passing one," said Mrs. Oxburgh in an undertone, with a glance at Joy and Jack.

"So do I. But perhaps they will be when they are as old as we are," said the squire.

"Frances and Tom, I think, are. Theirs is a perfectly happy marriage."

"Yes," assented the squire.

And so it was, for it was built on a rock, so none of the storms of life were strong enough to destroy it.

"I know another perfectly happy marriage," said Jack, who had overheard Mrs. Oxburgh's last remark.

"Do you? Whose?" said the squire.

"Some people I know in Egypt. You remember Miss Dorcas Keppel, sir—now Mrs. Dobson? She and her husband were at my station, and I saw a good deal of them; and a happier couple

it would be hard to find. She looks ten years younger than she did in Jersey, and he simply worships her."

"I am very glad to hear it. I always liked Dorcas Keppel ; she is a very sensible woman. By the way, Jack, talking of Jersey, what has become of that young Jimpson who enlisted some years ago, the parson's son ? Has he gone to the bad entirely ?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir. He has just got his commission, and has exchanged into our sister regiment, to which we are linked. He is out there with the dépôt, and Mrs. Dobson is his greatest friend ; she is like a mother to him. He is doing very well, indeed, and will make a fine officer. He is sobered down very much, and looks much older than he is."

Jack did not add that he had been instrumental in getting Jack Jimpson his commission, but this was the case, for he knew the boy owed his misfortunes in a great measure to poor Amy, and he had felt it his duty to atone in some measure for her selfishness.

The news of Amy's terrible death had had a great effect on Jack Jimpson. He was a changed man from the day he heard it ; before, he had been reckless, but from then he set to work to study hard for his examinations, and as he was popular with his officers and Jack had a good deal of influence, he succeeded in getting his commission.

He will, probably, be all the better soldier and man for having borne the yoke in his youth, and here we leave him.

### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### AT LAST.

"Grow old along with me,  
The best is yet to be ;  
The last of life for which the first was made."

THE demon of coquetry is one which requires a great deal of casting out ; it will return again and again to its victim. It took possession of Joy in spite of all her efforts to keep it out directly Captain Lockwood returned. He had not been in the house twenty-four hours before Joy was leading him a fine dance. In the day-time the children were her body-guard ; he could never catch her without one or other of them in her arms, and after they

were gone to bed Joy took refuge under the shadow of her mother's wing.

In vain for him to try and catch her alone ; he never succeeded. He laid traps for her, but she managed to elude them all. Then he got angry, and determined he would see her alone, whether she liked it or not. She could not control the blush of delight which overspread her clear complexion when he came near her ; she could not keep her little hand from trembling when he squeezed it night and morning ; she could not keep her heart from beating with pleasure when he entered the room she was in. But she could and did shrink from him, like a silly, shy school-girl, to his great annoyance and her secret delight, for she saw her conduct piqued him and made him desperate.

Joy knew she was behaving foolishly ; she knew he was a proud man, who would not stand snubbing ; but she was proud too, and she was determined he should not suspect how much she cared for him until she heard from him that he still loved her.

She was by no means sure whether she or Gladys was the magnet which brought him to England, and until she was certain of this she was determined not to let him see how much she enjoyed his presence. What a contrast she was to poor Amy, who always met her admirers half-way, whereas Joy fled from hers like a bird before a gale.

He had been a week at Oxburgh, when one evening there was a dinner party, and Joy had to remain in the drawing-room and entertain her guests instead of fleeing to her mother's room as she generally did after dinner. He tried in vain to get a few minutes' private conversation with her during the evening. At last all the guests left, and Joy, somewhat to his surprise and much to his delight, instead of going to bed, moved into the conservatory, which opened out of the drawing-room.

He followed her and shut the door behind them.

"At last I have caught you. Now, Joy, tell me what——" he began, seizing Joy by the waist,

"Is it freezing, Perriam ?" said Joy coolly, as she slipped away from him.

Perriam was at the other end of the conservatory, making up the fire for the night ; Joy had heard him come in or would not have ventured there herself.

Jack turned on his heel and, muttering something to himself, went off in a rage to the smoking-room to soothe his wounded feelings with a pipe.

The next morning, to the delight of the children, it was snowing fast when they got up ; the great beautiful flakes fell silently down, carpeting the ground with a soft white carpet, and changing the whole aspect of the outer world as snow only can change it. It wrought other changes besides these external ones ; it awoke delight in the children and ecstasy in The Captain, who revelled in it ; it apparently recalled Amy's sad death to her husband, for he was very grave and silent ; it seemed to depress the squire, and it dispelled Joy's coquetry as the wind dispels a fog.

She was graver than usual, for the snow could not fail to bring back to her memory also that snow-storm two years ago, when she and Amy and Mr. Selsey had snowballed each other, she and he at least all unconscious of the tragedy that night was to bring forth. But there was no coquetry about her, her manner to Jack was full of sympathy, for she felt he was thinking of his dead wife and the sad circumstances of her death.

After breakfast the squire went to his own room ; Jack moved to the window and, with his hands in his pockets, stood sadly and silently watching the snow as it fell ; while Joy, instead of rushing up to the nursery, as she generally did after breakfast, sat over the fire pretending to read a newspaper.

Now was Jack's time ; he was alone with Joy, and the devil of coquetry had been exorcized by the snow for a time. Would he avail himself of the opportunity, one which might not return again ?

It seemed not, for as the hands of the clock on the chimney-piece moved slowly on silence reigned in the room, and he stood motionless, watching the snow. In another twenty minutes the servants would come in to clear away the breakfast things ; it was past ten now, and punctually at half-past they would come.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a loud impatient bark ; it was The Captain, begging Jack to let him in at the window for his morning bowl of tea, which his delight at the snow had almost made him forget. Jack made no attempt to open the window, and The Captain's barks waxed furious, till at last his mistress remembered he had not had his tea.

"Why, my dear Captain, what is your mistress thinking of ?

"Come in, my own doggie, come in," said Joy, rushing to the window to open it.

"I beg your pardon ; I was not attending to the dog," said Jack, reaching forward to help her.

His hand grasped hers as she turned the handle which opened the French window, and their eyes met as the dog bounded into the room and rushed to his tea, which was on the floor awaiting him.

Jack kept the hand he held, and closing the window with his disengaged one, said :

"At last. I won't let you go now till you have heard what I have to say."

Joy evinced no particular desire to go just then. She stood trembling before him, the red blood flitting like rosy clouds over her cheeks, her eyes downcast, the great transparent blue-veined lids veiling them, her right hand in his, his left stealing unforbidden round her waist, the morning sun lighting up her red-brown hair till it looked like burnished gold.

Jack, however, was too intent in gazing at the fair face to notice the hair ; he wanted to read his answer in those downcast eyes.

"Joy, do you know what brought me home ?" he whispered.

"Gladys, I suppose," said Joy, the demon of coquetry trying to find an entrance again.

"No ; it was some one dearer to me than Gladys, precious as she is. Guess again."

He was standing very close to her now.

"Lance, then," said Joy, with a shy look up at him.

"Joy, you know better ; you know it was you, my own, my first, my last, my only love ; it was you who brought me back to England. I came to see you ; to tell you once more how I love you ; to ask you to be my wife. Don't send me away, Joy ; don't say you no longer love me."

"I don't," said Joy coyly.

"You don't ! My God ! I feared you didn't," cried Lockwood, turning pale, and, taking her face in his hands, he held it up to gaze into her eyes and see if she spoke the truth.

"I mean I don't say so," explained Joy.

"Don't say what ?"

"What you told me not to say," said Joy, taking hold of his wrists with her little hands to remove his hands from her face.

"Joy, Joy, what do you mean?" he cried, hope reviving in his heart, as he bent closer down to the face he still held in his hands.

And then somehow Joy's arms slipped round his neck, her lips met his, and there was no need for a verbal explanation of her meaning.

Joy was the first to speak coherently after the pause which ensued in the conversation.

"At last, Jack! Oh! what a time we have had to wait; it seems a lifetime since your horse ran away with us."

"Have you loved me all that time, Joy?"

"I hope not; I tried not to, until two years ago, and then—" Joy paused.

"What then?"

"Then I did not try any longer; it was very foolish, perhaps, but it was no longer wrong."

"Joy, you are an angel, and I am not fit to buckle your shoes."

"Never mind, they don't buckle," said Joy.

"Joy, listen. I never tried to forget you till I read poor Amy's letter, written the night of her death; then I was filled with remorse, for then I learnt she loved me. Perhaps, had I suspected it, I might have done my best to crush out my love for you; I don't know. At any rate, I *did try* to do so after her death, to make reparation for the past, but it was no use: the more I tried to suppress it the more it grew; my love was like the wild camomile, which the more you tread on the faster it grows; until at last I saw the folly of undoing one wrong by committing another, and it seemed to me the best way to atone for having been a bad husband to Amy, was to be a good one to you."

Just as Captain Lockwood finished this speech, the door opened and two servants entered the room to clear away the breakfast, and before Joy had told her mother of her happiness, her engagement was known in the servants' hall; although both she and Jack had flattered themselves the sudden propriety of their attitudes when the door opened had betrayed nothing.

Captain Lockwood had only three months' leave; five weeks of which were gone when he and Joy came to this understanding; the journey out would occupy nearly another three weeks, they were going overland to Naples; so there remained only

a month to get Joy's outfit and *trousseau* and prepare for the wedding.

It was therefore necessarily a very short engagement, only a month, but they had waited so long before for each other that neither Jack nor Joy regretted it.

They spent the first few days of their honeymoon at Dover, where they were joined by Rose and Green and little Gladys, whom they took with them, leaving Lance with Mr. and Mrs. Oxburgh, to comfort them in their loneliness now both their daughters were married and Felix only able to pay then "angel's" visits, few and far between. Felix was going to meet the bride and bridegroom at Venice and go with them as far as Rome.

So Jack's second house was built on the rock of a true love, which had already weathered many storms and withstood gales and floods in the past, and there is little doubt a marriage built on such a foundation will withstand all the storms which life may bring to bear upon it; no less solid a foundation would warrant the hope that Jack and his second wife may live happy ever after.

#### L'ENVOI.

IT was evening.

The sun had set, and the pale moon had risen, and was casting her silvery light over that magic city of Venice, wrapping her marble palaces in its sheen, and casting their long reflections into the waters of the canals.

On the Piazzetta, between the granite columns of St. Theodore and the Winged Lion, stood, as they had stood nearly six years ago, Felix Oxburgh and Jack Lockwood; they had their backs to the sea and were looking, Jack at the Ducal Palace, never so lovely as by moonlight, Felix at the cupolas and façade of St. Mark.

They were both changed, Jack even more than Felix, though the latter was now tonsured and in priest's clothes; they were both strikingly handsome men; Felix conspicuously so because of his gigantic proportions.

"Do you remember our standing here six years ago, Felix, and wondering what we should think of life fifty years hence?" said Jack.

"Perfectly. We looked over the sea then, now we have turned our backs on the sea, the future, and are content to gaze

at the Piazza ; a sign, I think, we are both happier now than we were then ; we are content to live in the present, which only children and happy people do."

"Are you very happy, old boy ?" said Felix affectionately, running his arm through Jac 's.

"Perfectly ; I don't deserve it, but I am. I seem to have lived a lifetime since you and I last stood here, Felix ; and yet as I look back on it all it seems like a dream, and I can criticize my conduct as though I were another person. I was very much to blame, far more than any one knows ; my only excuse is I never guessed she cared for me : had I known it, I should have acted differently."

"I don't think you would ever have been happy, Jack ; you see, your house was built on the sand ; ruin was inevitable some day. Poor child ! How lovely she was. *Requiescat in pace,*" said Felix, and Jack knew from the tone in which he spoke of Amy, he still regarded her with tender affection. "But, Jack, I have no fears for your future this time ; you have built on the rock of true love. Joy is your lot, I hope, in every sense," said Felix.

"And are you happy, Felix ?"

"Yes ; I have found my vocation. Life is not vanity, Jack, as we half-feared years ago ; it is a battle in which it behoves us to be valiant, that we may gain the day to which there is no night.

Per

"No at noonday, in the bustle of man's work-time,  
Greet the unseen with a cheer!  
Bid him forward, breast and back, as either should be,  
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever  
There as here!"

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CAFE

THE END.

